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THE SEVEN CARDINAL SINS
LUXURY







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1888
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**LUXURY
GLUTTONY
AVARICE
ANGER**

Four of the Seven Cardinal Sins



BY
EUGENE SUE

ILLUSTRATED

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New York



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120A

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Luxury and Gluttony.



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CHAPTER I.

THE palace of the Élysée-Bourbon,—the old hôtel of the Marquise de Pompadour,—situated in the middle of the Faubourg St. Honoré, was, previous to the last revolution, furnished, as every one knows, for the occupancy of foreign royal highnesses,—Roman Catholic, Protestant, or Mussulman, from the princes of the German confederation to Ibrahim Pacha.

About the end of the month of July, in a year long past, at eleven o'clock in the morning, several young secretaries and gentlemen belonging to the retinue of his Royal Highness, the Archduke Leopold Maximilian, who had occupied the Élysée for six weeks, met in one of the official parlours of the palace.

"The review on the Field of Mars in honour of his Royal Highness is prolonged," remarked one of the company. "The audience of the prince will be crowded this morning."

"The fact is," replied another, "five or six persons have already been waiting a half-hour, and monseigneur, in his rigorous military punctuality, will regret this enforced delay."

Then one of the doors opened; a young man not more than twenty years old at most, a guest of the house, crossed the parlour, and entered an adjoining

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chamber, after having saluted, with mingled kindness and embarrassment, the speakers, who rose upon seeing him, thus testifying a deference which seemed unwarranted by his age and position.

When he had disappeared, one of the gentlemen, alluding to him, said :

“ Poor Count Frantz, always so timid ! A young girl of fifteen, just out of the convent, would have more assurance ! To look at him, who would believe him capable of such rare bravery, and that, too, for three years in the Caucasus war ? And that he came so valiantly and brilliantly out of that duel forced on him in Vienna ? I, gentlemen, picture to myself Count Frantz modestly dropping his eyes as he gave the Circassians a thrust of his sword.”

“ Besides, I believe that his Royal Highness makes a decided convenience of the ingenuousness of his son — ”

“ The devil ! No indiscretion, dear sir ! ”

“ Let me finish, please. I say that monseigneur makes a convenience of the unconquerable ingenuousness of his godson.”

“ Well and good. And I think with you that the prince does not see this handsome boy exposed to the temptations of wicked Paris, without some anxiety. But what are you smiling at, my dear sir ? ”

“ Nothing.”

“ Do you think that Count Frantz has had some love affair, in spite of his apparent innocence ? ”

“ You can see after a little, gentlemen, all the fine things a smile may mean, for I call you to witness I am satisfied with smiling.”

“ Seriously, my dear sir, what do you think of Count Frantz ? ”

“ I think nothing, I say nothing, I shall be as mute as a diplomatist whose interest it is to keep silent, or as a young officer of the noble guards when he passes, for the first time, under the inspection of monseigneur.”

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"The truth is, the prince has a glance which intimidates the boldest. But to return to Count Frantz."

This conversation was interrupted by a number of persons who entered the official chamber.

The newcomers banished the thought of Count Frantz, and two or three voices asked at once :

"Well, what about your sightseeing ? Is this famous manufactory in the Faubourg St. Marceau worth the trouble of a visit ?"

"For my part, gentlemen, I am always very curious about the construction of machinery," replied one who had just entered. "The whole morning has been interesting, and I declare M. Charles Dutertre, the proprietor of this factory, one of the most accomplished and intelligent machinists that I know, besides being a most agreeable man ; I intend to persuade monseigneur to visit his workshops."

"Well and good, my dear sir ; we will not accuse you of wasting your time in frivolities, but I have not such high pretensions, and my pretension is only in a state of hope."

"And what hope ?"

"To be invited to dine with the celebrated Doctor Gasterini."

"The most illustrious, the most profound gourmand of Europe."

"They say, really, that his table is an ideal of the paradise of gourmands."

"I do not know, alas ! if this paradise will be as open to me as the other, but I hope so."

"I confess my weakness. Of all that I have seen in Paris, what has most charmed me, fascinated me, dazzled me, I will even say instructed — "

"Well, is what ?"

"It is — our proud and modest Germany will blush at the blasphemy — it is — "

"Do finish !"

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“It is the Mabille ball !”

The laughter and the exclamations provoked by this frank avowal lasted until one of the secretaries of the archduke entered, holding two letters in his hand, and saying, gaily :

“ Gentlemen, fresh news from Bologna and Venice !”

“ Bravo, my dear Ulrik, what news ?”

“ The most curious, the most extraordinary in the world !”

“ Really ?”

“ Quick, tell us, dear Ulrik.”

“ In the first place, Bologna, and Venice afterward, have been for several days in a state of incredible agitation, for reason of a series of events not less incredible.”

“ A revolution ?”

“ A movement of young Italy ?”

“ Perhaps a new mandate from the papal defender ?”

“ No, gentleman, it concerns a woman.”

“ A woman ?”

“ Yes, if it is not the devil, which I am inclined to believe.”

“ Ulrik, you are putting us to entreaty, do explain.”

“ Do you remember, gentlemen, last year, having heard in Germany that young Mexican widow, the Marquise de Miranda, spoken of ?”

“ Zounds ! the one whom our poet, Moser-Hartmann, wrote of in such magnificent and passionate verse, under the name of the modern Aphrodite.”

“ Ah, ah, ah, what a charming mistake !” said one of the inquirers, roaring with laughter. “ Moser-Hartmann, the religious and soulful poet, the chaste poet, pure and cold as the immaculate snow, sings Aphrodite, in burning verses. I have heard those admirable verses repeated, but, evidently, they are the production of another Hartmann.”

“ And I assure you, my dear sir, and Ulrik will confirm it, that this poem, which they say rightfully ranks

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with the most beautiful odes of Sappho, is truly the work of Moser-Hartmann."

"Nothing more true," replied Ulrik. "I heard Moser-Hartmann recite the verses himself,—they are worthy of antiquity."

"Then I believe you, but how do you explain this sudden incomprehensible transformation?"

"Ah, my God! This transformation which has changed a cold, correct man, but a man of estimable talent, indeed, a man of genius, full of fire and power, whose name is renowned through Europe—this transformation has been wrought by the woman whom the poet has praised, by the Marquise de Miranda."

"Moser-Hartmann so changed? I would have thought the thing impossible!"

"Bah!" replied Ulrik, "the marquise has done several things, and here is one of her best tricks, written to me from Bologna. There was there a cardinal legate of the Pope, the terror and aversion of the country."

"His name is Orsini, a man as detestable as he is detested."

"And his exterior reveals his nature. I saw him in Lombardy. What a cadaverous, sinister face! He always seemed to me the very type of an inquisitor."

"Well, the marquise took him to a ball at the Casino in Bologna, disguised as a Hungarian hussar!"

"The cardinal legate as a Hungarian hussar!" cried the company, in one voice.

"Come, Ulrik, you are telling an idle tale."

"You can read this letter, and when you see who signs it you will doubt no longer, skeptical as you are," replied Ulrik. "Yes, the marquise made Orsini accompany her so disguised; then, in the midst of the dance, she tore his mask from his face and said, in a loud voice: 'Good evening, Cardinal Orsini,' and, laughing like a crazy woman, she disappeared, leaving the legate exposed to the hoots and hisses of the exasperated crowd. He

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would have run some danger if his escort had not protected him. The next day Bologna was in a stir, demanding the dismissal of Orsini, who, after two days of excitement, was forced to leave the city by night. In the evening every house was illuminated for joy, and my correspondent says the monogram of the marquise was seen on many transparencies."

"And what became of her?"

"She was not seen again, she left for Venice," replied Ulrik, showing a second letter, "and there, they write me, another thing has happened."

"What a woman! What a woman!"

"What sort of a woman is she?"

"Have you seen her?"

"No."

"Nor I."

"Nor I."

"They say she is very tall and very slender."

"They told me she was above the ordinary height."

"One thing is sure, she is a brunette, because Moser-Hartmann praises her black eyes and black eyebrows."

"All I can say is," replied Ulrik, "that in this letter from Venice, which place the marquise has recently left for France, as I am informed, she is poetically called the 'blonde star,' so I think she must be a blonde."

"But what has she done in Venice? What has happened there?"

"My faith!" exclaimed Ulrik, "it is an adventure which smacks of the manners of pagan antiquity and the middle ages of Italy at the same time."

Unfortunately for the curiosity of Ulrik's auditors, the sudden beating of a drum outside announced the return of the Archduke Leopold, and each person in the house of the prince at once went to his post, ready to receive the Royal Highness.

In fact, the sentinel of the Élysée, descrying the approach of several carriages in the livery of the King of

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the French, had called “To arms!” The soldiers on guard with their commanding officer were immediately in line, and at the moment the carriages entered successively the immense court of the Élysée, the drums beat and the troops presented arms.

The first of the carriages stopped before the palace; the footmen in bright red livery opened the door, and his Royal Highness, the Archduke Maximilian Leopold, slowly ascended the steps, conversing with a colonel, officer of ordinance, whose office it was to accompany him; a few steps behind the prince came his aids-de-camp, dressed in brilliant foreign uniforms, and took their places in order at the foot of the steps by the royal carriages. The archduke, thirty-nine years old, was robust, yet slenderly proportioned. He wore with military severity the full-dress uniform of the field-marshall, white coat, with epaulettes of gold; scarlet easimir breeches over which reached the shining black of his high riding-boots, a little dusty, as he had assisted in the review appointed in his honour. The great cordon red, the collar of the fleece of gold, and five or six medallions of different orders ornamented his breast; his hair was pale blond, as was his long moustache turned up in military style, which gave a still more severe expression to his features, and strongly augmented the breadth of his chin and the prominent angle of his nose; his eye, cold and penetrating, half-covered by the eyelid, was set under a very heavy eyebrow, which gave him the air of always looking very high. This severe and disdainful glance, united to an imperious manner and an inflexible carriage of the head, gave to the whole personal bearing of the archduke a remarkable character of arrogant, icy authority.

About a quarter of an hour after the prince had returned to the Élysée, the carriage of a French minister, and that of an ambassador from a great power in the North, stopped successively before the entrance,

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and the statesman and the diplomatist entered the palace.

Almost at the same moment, one of the principal persons of this story arrived on foot in the court of the Elysée-Bourbon.

M. Pascal, for such was our hero's name, appeared to be about thirty-six years old. He was of middle stature, very dark, and wore quite a long beard, as rough and black as his eyebrows, beneath which glittered two little very piercing gray eyes. As he had the habit of holding his head down, and his two hands in the pockets of his trousers, the attitude served to increase the roundness of his broad shoulders. His features were especially remarkable for their expression of sarcastic sternness, to which was joined that air of inexorable assurance peculiar to people who are convinced of their power and are vain of it. A narrow black cravat, tied, as they say, à la Colin, a long waistcoat of Scotch cloth, a light great-coat, whitish in colour, a gray hat well worn, and wide nankin trousers, in the pockets of which M. Pascal kept his hands, made up his costume of doubtful cleanliness, and perfectly in harmony with the extreme heat of the season and the habitual carelessness of the wearer.

When M. Pascal passed before the porter's lodge, he was challenged by that functionary, who from the depth of his armchair called :

“ Eh ! — speak, sir, where are you going ? ”

Either M. Pascal did not hear the porter, or he did not wish to give himself the trouble to reply, as he continued to walk toward the entrance of the palace without saying a word.

The porter, forced to rise from his armchair, ran after the mute visitor, and said, impatiently :

“ I ask again, sir, where are you going ? You can reply, can you not ? ”

M. Pascal stopped, took a disdainful survey of his

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interlocutor, shrugged his shoulders, and said, as he turned again toward the entrance: "I am going — to see the archduke."

The porter knew the class with which he was accustomed to deal. He could not imagine that this visitor, in a summer greatcoat and loose cravat, really had an audience with the prince, or would dare to present himself before his Highness in a costume so impertinently outside of the regulation, for all persons who had the honour of being received at the palace were usually attired in black; so taking M. Pascal for some half-witted or badly informed tradesman, he followed him, calling in a loud voice:

"But sir, tradespeople who come to see his Highness do not pass by the grand staircase. Down there at the right you will see the door for tradesmen and servants by which you ought to enter."

M. Pascal did not care to talk; he shrugged his shoulders again, and continued his march toward the staircase without a word.

The porter, exasperated by this silence and this obstinacy, seized M. Pascal by the arm, and, speaking louder still, said:

"Must I tell you again, sir, that you cannot pass that way?"

"What do you mean, scoundrel?" cried M. Pascal, in a tone of contempt and anger, as if this outrage on the part of the porter was as insolent as inconceivable, "do you know to whom you are talking?"

There was in these words an expression of authority so threatening, that the poor porter, frightened for a moment, stammered:

"Monsieur, — I — do — not — know."

The great door of the vestibule was suddenly opened. One of the aids-de-camp of the prince, having seen from the parlour window the altercation between the visitor and the porter, hastily descended the staircase, and,

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eagerly approaching M. Pascal, said to him in excellent French, with a sympathetic tone :

“ Ah, monsieur, his Royal Highness will, I am sure, be much grieved by this misunderstanding. Do me the honour to follow me ; I will introduce you at once. I have just received orders from monseigneur concerning you, sir.”

M. Pascal bowed his head in assent, and followed the aid-de-camp, leaving the porter amazed and afflicted by his own want of address.

When M. Pascal and his guide arrived in the chamber of waiting, where other officials were congregated, the young officer said :

“ The audience of his Royal Highness is crowded this morning, because the review detained monseigneur much longer than he expected, so, desiring to make you wait as short a time as possible, he has ordered me to conduct you, upon your arrival, into a chamber adjoining his private office, where his Royal Highness will meet you as soon as his conference with the minister of foreign affairs is ended.”

M. Pascal again made sign of assent, and, following the aid-de-camp, crossed a dark passage, and entered a chamber overlooking the magnificent garden of the Élysée-Bourbon.

Before withdrawing, the aid-de-camp, not a little annoyed by the unfortunate altercation between the porter and M. Pascal, remarked the negligent attire of the latter. Habituated to the severe formalities of etiquette, the young courtier was shocked at the unconventional dress of the person he was about to introduce, and hesitated between the fear of antagonising a man like Pascal and the desire to protest against the unsuitability of his bearing as an insult to the dignity of a prince, who was known to be inexorable in all that pertained to the respect due his rank ; but the first fear prevailed, and as it was too late to insist upon a change

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of dress consistent with the requirements of court etiquette, the young courtier said :

“ As soon as the foreign minister withdraws from the presence of his Royal Highness, I will inform him, sir, that you are at his orders.”

These last words, “ that you are at his orders,” did not appear to sound very well in the ears of M. Pascal. A sardonic smile played upon his lips, but making himself at home, so to speak, and finding the temperature of the room too warm, he opened one of the windows, placed his elbows on the balustrade, and, keeping his hat on his head, occupied himself with a survey of the garden.

CHAPTER II.

EVERYBODY knows the garden of the Élysée, that charming little park, planted with the most beautiful trees in the world, whose fresh green turf is watered by a clear winding river; a terraced walk, shaded by elms a century old, borders this park on the side of the avenue called Marigny; a similar walk, parallel to it, bounds it on the opposite side, and a very low wall separates it from the neighbouring gardens. This last mentioned walk ended a short distance from the window where M. Pascal was so comfortably seated, and soon his attention was keenly awakened by several incidents.

The young man who had passed through the parlour, occupied by secretaries and gentlemen, and who had, for reason of his timidity, been the subject of several remarks, was slowly promenading the shaded walk. He was of slender and graceful stature. Every few moments he stopped, stooped down, and remained immovable a second, then continued his promenade. When he reached the extremity of the walk, he approached, almost by stealth, the wall bordering upon the adjacent garden, and, as at this point the wall was hardly more than four feet high, he leaned upon it, apparently absorbed in reflection or the expectation of meeting another person.

So long as the promenader kept his back turned to M. Pascal, who now began to feel very curious concerning him, his features of course could not be distinguished; but when he turned, after having made some

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desired discovery, and retraced his steps, he was face to face with his observer at the window.

Count Frantz de Neuberg, as we have said, passed for the godson of the archduke, by whom he was tenderly loved. According to the rumours of the court, his Royal Highness, having had no children since his marriage with the Princess of Saxe-Teschen, had abundant reason for exercising paternal interest in Frantz de Neuberg, the secret fruit of a first love.

Frantz, scarcely twenty years old at the time of this history, presented the perfect type of the melancholy beauty of the North. His long blond hair, parted in the middle of a brow as white and ingenuous as that of a young girl, framed a face whose regularity was without a flaw. His large blue eyes, soft and dreaming, seemed to reflect the purity of his soul, and an incipient beard, shading his chin and upper lip with a silken, golden down, accentuated the virility of his charming face.

As he came up the walk, Frantz more and more attracted the attention of M. Pascal, who looked at him with a sort of admiring surprise, for it would have been difficult not to observe the rare perfection of the young man's features; but when at a short distance from the window he encountered the fixed and persistent gaze of M. Pascal, he appeared not less provoked than embarrassed, blushed, looked downward, and, turning on his heel, abruptly, quickened his pace until he reached the middle of the walk, where he began again his slow promenade, evidently constrained by the thought that a stranger was watching his movements. He hardly dared approach the boundary of the neighbouring garden, but suddenly, forgetting all preoccupation, he ran toward the wall at the sight of a little straw hat which appeared on the other side, and encased in its frame lined with rose-coloured silk was the freshest, most entrancing countenance of fifteen years that ever entered into a young man's dream.

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"Mlle. Antonine," said Frantz quickly, in a low voice, "some one is looking at us."

"This evening," murmured a sweet voice, in reply.

And the little straw hat disappeared as by enchantment, as the young girl jumped from a bench she had mounted on the other side of the wall. But as compensation, no doubt, for this abrupt retreat, a beautiful rose fell at the feet of Frantz, who picked it up and passionately pressed it to his lips, then, hiding the flower in his waistcoat, the young man disappeared in a thicket instead of continuing his promenade in the long walk. Notwithstanding the rapidity with which these incidents transpired, and the instantaneous disappearance of the little straw hat, M. Pascal had seen distinctly the exquisite loveliness of the young girl's face, and Frantz also, as he kissed the rose which fell at his feet.

The hard and saturnine features of M. Pascal took on a strange and gloomy expression, where one could read violent anger mingled with jealousy, pain, and hatred. For some moments, his physiognomy, almost terrifying in its malevolence, betrayed the man, who, accustomed to see all bend before him, is capable of sentiments and actions of diabolical wickedness when an unforeseen obstacle contradicts his iron will.

"She! she! here in this garden near the Elysée!" exclaimed he, with concentrated rage. "What is she doing there? Triple fool that I am! she comes here to coquet with this puny, blond youth. Perhaps she lives in the next hôtel. Misery! misery! to find out the place where she dwells after having done everything in vain to discover it since this damned pretty face of fifteen struck my eyes, and made me a fool,—I, who believed myself dead to these sudden and frantic caprices, compared to which what are called violent passions of the heart are ice. I have met this little girl three times, and feel myself, as in my young days, capable of anything in order to possess her. How jealousy

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irritates and devours me this moment! Misery! it is stupid, it is silly, but oh, how I suffer!"

As he uttered these words, M. Pascal's face expressed malicious and ferocious grief; then shaking his fist at the side of the wall where the little straw hat had disappeared, he muttered, in a voice of concentrated rage:

" You shall pay for it. Go, little girl, and whatever it may cost me, you shall belong to me."

And sitting with his elbows on the balustrade, unable to detach his angry glances from the spot where he had seen Frantz speak to the young girl, M. Pascal presented a picture of fury and despair, when one of the doors of the parlour softly opened, and the archduke entered.

The prince, evidently, felt so sure that he would meet his expected visitor face to face, that, beforehand, instead of his usual cold arrogance, he had assumed a most agreeable expression, entering the room with a smile upon his lips.

But M. Pascal, leaning half way out of the window, had not heard the door open, and, never suspecting the presence of the prince, he remained seated, his back to the Royal Highness, and his elbows on the sill of the window.

A physiognomist witnessing this silent scene would have found in it a curious study of the reaction of feeling in the countenance of the prince.

At the sight of M. Pascal leaning out of the window, wearing a summer greatcoat, and violating all propriety by keeping his hat on his head, the archduke stopped short; his assumed smile vanished from his lips, and, taking a prouder attitude than ordinary, he stiffened himself in his handsome uniform, turned purple with anger, knit his eyebrows, while his eyes flashed with indignation. But soon reflection, doubtless, appeasing this inner storm, the features of the prince took on an expression of resignation as bitter as it was sad, and he

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bowed his head, as if he submitted to a fatal necessity.

Stifling a sigh of offended pride as he threw a glance of vindictive contempt on Pascal at the window, the prince again assumed, as we have said, his smile of affability, and walked toward the casement, coughing loud enough to announce his presence, and spare himself the last humiliation of touching the shoulder of our familiar visitor in order to attract his attention.

At the sonorous “hum-hum!” of his Royal Highness, M. Pascal turned around suddenly. The gloomy expression of his face was succeeded by a sort of cruel and malicious satisfaction, as if the occasion had furnished a victim upon whom he could vent his suppressed wrath.

M. Pascal approached the prince, saluted him in a free and easy manner, and holding his hat in one hand, while the other was plunged deep in his pocket, he said :

“A thousand pardons, monseigneur, really I did not know you were there.”

“I am persuaded of that, M. Pascal,” replied the prince, with ill-disguised haughtiness.

Then he added :

“Please follow me into my study, sir. I have some official news to communicate to you.”

And he walked toward his study, when M. Pascal, with apparent calmness, for this man had a wonderful control over himself when it was necessary, said :

“Monseigneur, will you permit me one question?”

“Speak, sir,” replied the prince, stopping and turning to his visitor, with surprise.

“Monseigneur, who is that young man of twenty at the most, with long blond hair, who promenades in the walk which can be seen from this window? Who is he, monseigneur?”

“You mean, no doubt, monsieur, my godson, Count Frantz de Neuberg.”

“Ah, this young man is your godson, monseigneur?

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I congratulate you sincerely,— one could not see a prettier boy."

"Is he not?" replied the prince, sensible of this praise, even in the mouth of Pascal. "Has he not a charming face?"

"That is what I have just been observing at my leisure, monseigneur."

"And Count Frantz has not only a charming face," added the prince; "he has fine qualities of heart and great bravery."

"I am enchanted, monseigneur, to know that you have such an accomplished godson. Has he been in Paris long?"

"He arrived with me."

"And he will depart with you, monseigneur, for it must be painful for you to be separated from this amiable young man?"

"Yes, monsieur, I hope to take Count Frantz with me back to Germany."

"A thousand pardons, monseigneur, for my indiscreet curiosity, but your godson is one of those persons in whom one is interested in spite of himself. Now, I am at your service."

"Then follow me, if you please, monsieur."

Pascal nodded his head in assent, and, walking side by side with the archduke, he reached the door of the study with him, then, stopping with a gesture of deference, which was only another impertinence, he bowed slightly, and said to the prince, as if his Highness had hesitated to enter first:

"After you, monseigneur, after you."

The prince understood the insolence, but swallowed it, and entered his study, making a sign to Pascal to follow him.

The latter, although unaccustomed to the ceremonial of the court, had too much penetration not to comprehend the import of his acts and words. He had not

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only the consciousness of his insolence, instigated by his recent and suppressed resentment, but this insolence he had actually studied and calculated, and even in his interview had considered the question of addressing his Royal Highness as monsieur, simply ; but, by a refinement of intelligent impertinence, he thought the ceremonious appellation of monseigneur would render his familiarities still more disagreeable to the dignity and good breeding of the prince.

Let us turn back to an analysis of the character of Pascal,—a character less eccentric, perhaps, than it appears at first to be. Let us say, simply, that for ten years of his life this man, born in a humble and precarious position, had as a day-labourer and drudge submitted to the most painful humiliations, the most insolent domination, and the most outrageous contempt. Thus, bitter and implacable hatreds were massed together in his soul, and the day when, in his turn, he became powerful, he abandoned himself without scruple and without remorse to the fierce joy of reprisal, and it gave him little concern if his revenge fell upon an innocent head.

The archduke, instead of a superior mind, possessed a long, practical acquaintance with men, acquired in the exercise of supreme authority in the military hierarchy of his country ; besides, in his second interview with M. Pascal,—at which interview we have assisted,—he had understood the significance of the studied insolence of this person, and when, as he entered his study with him, he saw him, without invitation, seat himself familiarly in the armchair just occupied by a prime minister, whom he found full of courtesy and deference, the prince felt a new and cruel oppression of the heart.

The penetrating glance of Pascal surprised the expression of this feeling on the face of the archduke, and he said to himself, with triumphant disdain : “ Here is a prince born on the steps of a throne, a cousin, at least,

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of all the kings of Europe, a generalissimo of an army of a hundred thousand soldiers, here he is in all the glory of his battle uniform, adorned with all the insignia of honour and war. This highness, this man, despises me in his pride of a sovereign race. He hates me because he has need of me, and knows well that he must humiliate himself; nevertheless, this man, in spite of his contempt, in spite of his hatred, I hold in my power, and I intend to make him feel it keenly, for to-day my heart is steeped in gall."

CHAPTER III.

M. PASCAL, having seated himself in the gilded arm-chair on the side of the table opposite the prince, first seized a mother-of-pearl paper-cutter that he found under his hand, and, whirling it incessantly, said :

“ Monseigneur, if it is agreeable to you, let us talk of business, for at a certain hour I must be in the Faubourg St. Marceau, at the house of a manufacturer, who is one of my friends.”

“ I wish to inform you, monsieur,” replied the prince, restraining himself with difficulty, “ that I have already postponed until to-morrow other audiences that should have taken place to-day, that I might devote all my time to you.”

“ That is very kind of you, monseigneur, but let us come to the point.”

The prince took up from the table a long sheet of official paper, and, handing it to M. Pascal, said to him :

“ This note will prove to you, monsieur, that all the parties interested in the transfer that is proposed to me not only authorise me formally to accept it, but willingly offer their pledges, and even protect all the accidents of my acceptance.”

M. Pascal, without moving from his armchair, extended his hand from one side of the table to the other, to receive the note, and, taking it, said :

“ There was absolutely nothing to be done without this security.”

And he began to read slowly, nibbling the while

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the mother-of-pearl knife, which he did not surrender for a moment.

The prince fixed an anxious, penetrating glance on Paseal, trying to divine, from the expression of his face, if his visitor had confidence in the security offered.

At the end of a few moments, M. Pascal discontinued his reading, saying between his teeth, with an offended air, as if he were talking to himself :

“ Ho ! ho ! This Article 7 does not suit me at all,—not at all ! ”

“ Explain yourself, monsieur,” said the prince, seriously annoyed.

“ However,” continued M. Pascal, taking up his reading again, without replying to the archduke, and pretending to be talking to himself, “ this Article 7 is corrected by Article 8,—yes,—and, in fact, it is quite good,—it is very good.”

The countenance of the prince seemed to brighten, for, earnestly occupied with the powerful interests of which M. Pascal had necessarily become the umpire, he forgot the impertinence and calculated wickedness of this man, who found a savage delight in making his victim pass through all the perplexities of fear and hope.

At the end of a few moments, each one of which brought new anxiety to the prince, M. Pascal exclaimed :

“ Impossible, that ! impossible ! For me everything would be annulled by this first supplementary article. It is a mockery ! ”

“ Monsieur,” cried the prince, “ speak more clearly ! ”

“ Pardon me, monseigneur, at that moment I was reading to myself. Well and good, if you wish, I will read for both of us.”

The archduke bowed his head, turned red with suppressed indignation, appeared discouraged, and leaned his head on his hand.

M. Pascal, continuing his perusal of the paper, threw

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a glance by stealth at the prince, and replied after a few moments, in a more satisfied tone :

“ This is a sure, incontestable security.”

Then, as the prince seemed to regain hope, he added :

“ Unfortunately, this security is apart from — ”

He did not finish, but continued his reading in silence.

Never a solicitor in distress imploring a haughty and unfeeling protector, never a despairing borrower humbly addressing a dishonest and whimsical usurer, never accused seeking to read his pardon or condemnation in the countenance of his judge, experienced the torture felt by the prince while M. Pascal was reading the note which he had examined and which he now laid on the table.

“ Well, monsieur,” said the prince, swallowing his impatience, “ what do you decide ? ”

“ Monseigneur, will you have the kindness to lend me a pen and some paper ? ”

The prince pushed an inkstand, a pen, and some paper before M. Pascal, who began a long series of figures, sometimes lifting his eyes to the ceiling, as if to make a calculation in his head, sometimes muttering incomplete sentences, such as —

“ No — I am mistaken because — but I was about to forget — it is evident — the balance will be equal if — ”

After long expectation on the part of the prince, M. Pascal threw the pen down on the table, plunged both hands in the pockets of his trousers, threw his head back, and shut his eyes, as if making a last mental calculation, then, holding his head up, said in a short, peremptory voice :

“ Impossible, monseigneur.”

“ What, monsieur ! ” cried the prince, dismayed. “ You assured me in our first interview that the operation was practicable.”

“ Practicable, monseigneur, but not accomplished.”

“ But this note, monsieur, this note, joined to the securities I have offered you ? ”

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"This note completes, I know, the securities indispensable to such an operation."

"Then, monsieur, how do you account for your refusal?"

"For particular reasons, monseigneur."

"But, I ask again, do I not offer all the security desirable?"

"Yes, monseigneur, I will say that I regard the operation not only feasible, but sure and advantageous to one who is willing to undertake it; so, I do not doubt, monseigneur, you can find —"

"Eh! monsieur," interrupted the prince, "you know that in the present financial crisis, and for other reasons which you understand as well as I, that you are the only person who can undertake this business."

"The preference of your Royal Highness honours and flatters me infinitely," said Pascal, with an accent of ironical recognition, "so I doubly regret my inability to meet it."

The prince perceived the sarcasm, and replied, feigning offence at the want of appreciation his kindness had met:

"You are unjust, monsieur. The proof that I adhered to my agreement with you in this affair is that I have refused to entertain the proposition of the house Durand."

"I am almost certain that it is a lie," thought M. Pascal, "but no matter, I will get information about the thing; besides, this house sometimes disturbs and cramps me. Fortunately, thanks to that knave, Marcelange, I have an excellent means of protecting myself from that inconvenience in the future."

"Another proof that I adhered directly to my personal agreement with you, M. Pascal," continued the prince, in a deferential tone, "is that I have desired no agent to come between us, certain that we would understand each other as the matter should be understood. Yes," added



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the archduke, with a still more insinuating tone, “ I hoped that this just homage rendered to your financial intelligence, so universally recognised — ”

“ Ah, monseigneur.”

“ To your character as honourable as it is honoured — ”

“ Monseigneur, really, you overwhelm me.”

“ I hoped, I repeat, my dear M. Pascal, that in coming frankly to you to propose — what? — an operation whose solidity and advantage you recognise, you would appreciate my attitude, since it appeals to the financier as much as to the private citizen. In short, I hoped to assure you, not only by pecuniary advantage, but by especial testimony, of my esteem and gratitude.”

“ Monseigneur — ”

“ I repeat it, my dear M. Pascal, of my gratitude, since, in making a successful speculation, you would render me an immense service, for you cannot know what the results of this loan I solicit from you would be to my dearest family interests.”

“ Monseigneur, I am ignorant of — ”

“ And when I speak to you of family interests,” said the prince, interrupting M. Pascal, whom he hoped to bring back to his views, “ when I speak of family interests, it is not enough; an important question of state also attaches to the transfer of the duchy that is offered me, and which I can acquire only through your powerful financial aid. So, in rendering me a personal service, you would be greatly useful to my nation, and you know, my dear M. Pascal, how great empires requite services done to the state.”

“ Excuse my ignorance, monseigneur, but I am altogether ignorant of the whole thing.”

The prince smiled, remained silent a moment, and replied, with an accent he believed irresistible:

“ My dear M. Pascal, are you acquainted with the celebrated banker, Tortolia ? ”

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“ I know him by name, monseigneur.”

“ Do you know that he is a prince of the Holy Empire ?”

“ Prince of the Holy Empire, monseigneur !” replied Pascal, with amazement.

“ I have my man,” thought the prince, and he replied aloud : “ Do you know that the banker, Tortolia, is a great dignitary in one of the most coveted orders ?”

“ It would be possible, monseigneur.”

“ It is not only possible, but it is an actual fact, my dear M. Pascal. Now, I do not see why what has been done for M. Tortolia cannot be done for you.”

“ Could that be, monseigneur ?”

“ I say,” repeated the prince, with emphasis, “ I say I do not see why an illustrious title and high dignities should not recompense you also.”

“ Me, monseigneur ?”

“ You.”

“ Me, monseigneur, I become Prince Pascal ?”

“ Why not ?”

“ Come, come, monseigneur is laughing at his poor servant.”

“ No one has ever doubted my promise, monsieur, and it is almost an offence to me to believe me capable of laughing at you.”

“ Then, monseigneur, I would laugh at myself, very heartily and very long, if I were stupid enough to desire to pose as a prince, or duke, or marquis, in Europe’s carnival of nobility ! You see, monseigneur, I am only a poor devil of a plebeian,— my father was a peddler, and I have been a day-labourer. I have laid up a few cents, in attending to my small affairs. I have only my common sense, but this good common sense, monseigneur, will always prevent my decking myself out as the Marquis de la Janotière — that is a very pretty story by Voltaire, you ought to read it, monseigneur ! — or making myself the laughing-stock of those malicious people

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who amuse themselves by creating marquises and princes out of poor folk."

The archduke was far from expecting this refusal and this bitter retort; however, he put a good face on it, and replied, significantly :

" M. Pascal, I admire this rough sincerity ; I admire this disinterestedness. Thank God, there are other means of proving to you my gratitude, and, one day, my friendship."

" Your friendship, monseigneur ?"

" It is because I know its worth," added the prince, with imposing dignity, " that I assure you of my friendship, if — "

" Your friendship for me, monseigneur," replied Pascal, interrupting the prince, " your friendship for me, who have, as the wicked ones say, increased my little possessions a hundredfold by dangerous methods, although I have come out of these calumniating accusations as white as a young dove ?"

" It is because you have, as you say, monsieur, come out of these odious calumnies, by which all who elevate themselves by labour and merit are pursued, that I would assure you of my affectionate gratitude, if you render me the important service I expect of you."

" Monseigneur, I could not be more impressed or more flattered by your kindness, but unfortunately business is business," said M. Pascal, " and this affair you air does not suit me at all. I need not say how much it costs me to renounce the friendship of which your Royal Highness has desired to assure me."

At this response, bitter and humiliating in its insulting irony, the prince was on the point of flying into a passion, but, reflecting upon the shame and futility of such a transport of rage, he controlled himself, and, desiring to attempt a final effort, he said, in an aggrieved tone :

" So, M. Pascal, it will be said that I prayed, supplicated, and implored you in vain."

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These words, “prayed, supplicated, implored,” uttered in a tone of sincere distress, appeared in the eyes of the prince to make an impression on M. Pascal, and, in fact, did make a decided impression, inasmuch as, up to that moment, the archduke had not entirely abased himself, but seeing this royal person, after such obstinate refusal, willing to descend to further supplication, M. Pascal experienced an intensity of happiness that he had never known before.

The prince, observing his silence, believed his purpose was shaken, and added, readily :

“Come, my dear M. Pascal, I cannot appeal to your generous heart in vain.”

“Really, monseigneur,” replied the bloodthirsty villain, who, knowing the speculation to be a good one, was at heart disposed to undertake it, but wanted to realise pleasure as well as profit from it, “you have such a way of putting things. Business, I repeat, ought to be business only, but see now, in spite of myself, I yield like a child to sentiment I am so weak — ”

“You consent?” interrupted the prince, radiant with joy, and he seized both hands of the financier in his own. “You consent, my worthy and kind M. Pascal?”

“How can I resist you, monseigneur?”

“At last!” cried the archduke, drawing a long breath of profound satisfaction, as if he had just escaped a frightful danger. “At last!”

“But, monseigneur,” replied Pascal, “I must make one little condition.”

“Oh, I shall not stand on that, whatever it may be. I subscribe to it beforehand.”

“You pledge yourself to more, perhaps, than you think, monseigneur.”

“What do you mean?” asked the prince, somewhat disquieted. “What condition do you speak of?”

“In three days, monseigneur, to the hour, I will inform you.”

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"What!" exclaimed the prince, astonished and crest-fallen; "more delays. Do you not give me your positive promise?"

"In three days, monseigneur, I will give it to you, provided you accept my condition."

"But, pray, tell me this condition now."

"Impossible, monseigneur."

"My dear M. Pascal — "

"Monseigneur," replied Pascal, with ironical gravity, "it is not my habit to be weak twice in succession during one interview. It is now the hour for my appointment in the Faubourg St. Marceau; I have the honour of presenting my respectful compliments to your Royal Highness."

M. Pascal, leaving the prince full of vexation and concern, walked to the door, then turned, and said:

"To-day is Monday; on Thursday, at eleven o'clock, I shall have the honour of seeing your Royal Highness again, and will then submit my little condition."

"Very well, monsieur; on Thursday."

M. Pascal bowed profoundly, and went out.

When he passed through the parlour where the officials were assembled all rose respectfully, recognising the importance of the person whom the prince had just received. M. Pascal returned their courtesy with a patronising inclination of the head, and left the palace as he had entered it, both hands in his pockets, not denying himself the pleasure — for this man lost nothing — of stopping a minute before the lodge of the porter and saying to him:

"Well, scoundrel, will you recognise me another time?"

"Oh, I shall recognise monsieur hereafter! I beg monsieur to pardon my mistake."

"He begs me," said Pascal, half aloud, with a bitter smile. "They know how to beg from the Royal Highness to the porter."

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M. Pascal, as he went out of the Élysée, fell again into painful reflections upon the subject of the young girl whose secret meeting with Count Frantz de Neuberg he had surprised. Wishing to know if she lived in the house contiguous to the palace, he was going to make inquiries, when, remembering that such a course might perhaps compromise his plans, he prudently resolved to wait until evening.

Seeing a hackney coach, he called the driver, entered the carriage, and said to him :

“Faubourg St. Marceau, fifteen ; the large factory whose chimney you see from the street.”

“The factory belonging to M. Dutertre ? I know, citizen, I know ; everybody knows that.”

The coachman drove down the street.

CHAPTER IV.

M. PASCAL, as we have said, had spent a part of his life in a subordinate and precarious position, enduring the most ignominious treatment with a patience full of bitterness and hatred.

Born of a peddler who had amassed a competency by dint of privation and illicit or questionable traffic, he had commenced his business career as a day-labourer in the house of a provincial usurer, to whom Pascal's father had entrusted the care of his money.

The first years of our hero were passed in a state of servitude as hard as it was humiliating. Nevertheless, as he was endowed with considerable intelligence and unusual ingenuity, and as his despotic will could, upon necessity, hide itself under an exterior of insinuating meanness,—a dissimulation which was the result of his condition,—Pascal, without the knowledge of his master, learned to read, write, and draw up accounts, the faculty for financial calculation developing in him spontaneously with marvellous rapidity. Foreseeing the value of these acquirements, he resolved to conceal them, using them only for his own advantage, and as a dangerous weapon against his master, whom he detested. After mature reflection, Pascal finally thought it his interest to reveal the knowledge he had secretly acquired. The usurer, struck with the ability of the man who was his drudge, then took him as his bookkeeper at a reduced salary, increased his meagre pay by the smallest possible amount, continued to treat him with brutal contempt,

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vilifying him more than ever that he might not suspect the use that he made of his new services.

Pascal, earnest, indefatigable in work, and eager to further his financial education, continued to submit passively to the outrages heaped upon him, redoubling his servility in proportion as his master redoubled disdain and cruelty.

At the end of a few years thus passed, he felt sufficiently strong to leave the province, and seek a field more worthy of his ability. He entered into a business correspondence with a banker in Paris, to whom he offered his services. The banker had long appreciated Pascal's work, accepted his proposition, and the book-keeper left the little town, to the great regret of his former master, who tried too late to retain him in his own interests.

The new patron of our hero was at the head of one of those rich houses, morally questionable, but—and it is not unusual—regarded, in a commercial sense, as irreproachable; because, if these houses deal in speculations which sometimes touch upon robbery and fraud, and enrich themselves by ingenious and successful bankruptcy, they, to use their own pretentious words, honour their signature, however dishonourable that signature may be in the opinion of others.

Fervent disciples of that beautiful axiom so universally adopted before the revolution of 1848,—Get rich!—they proudly take their seats in the Chamber of Commerce, heroically assume the name of honourable, and even aim at control of the administration. Why not?

The luxury so much boasted by the old tenants was misery compared to the magnificence of M. Thomas Rousselet.

Pascal, transplanted to this house of absurd and extravagant opulence, suffered humiliations altogether different, but quite as bitter and painful as when he was with the knavish usurer in the province, who, it is

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true, treated him as a despicable hireling, but had with him in his daily work frequent and familiar relations.

One would seek in vain, among the proudest nobility, the most exclusive aristocracy, anything which could approach the imperious and crushing disdain with which M. and Madame Rousselet treated their subordinates. Shut up in their gloomy offices, from which they saw the sumptuous displays of the Hôtel Rousselet, the persons employed in this house knew only by fairy-like tradition or fabulous legend the gorgeous wonders of these parlours and this dining-room, from which they were absolutely excluded by the dignity of Madame Rousselet, who was as haughty and domineering as the first lady of the chamber to a princess of Lorraine or Rohan.

Although of a new class, these humiliations were not the less galling to Pascal; he now felt more than ever his dependence, his nothingness, and the yoke of the opulent banker chafed him far more than the abuse of the usurer; but our hero, faithful to his plans, hid his wounds, smiled at blows, and licked the varnished boot which sometimes deigned to amuse itself by kicking him, redoubling labour, study, and shrewdness, until he learned the practice of this house, which he considered the perfect pattern of business enterprise, whose motto was :

“Get as much money as possible with the least money possible by all the means possible, carefully protecting yourself from the police and the court.”

The margin is a large one, and, as can be easily seen, one can operate there at pleasure.

Thus passed five or six years. The imagination revolts at the accumulation of bitterness, hatred, anger, venom, and malice in the depths of this calculating and vindictive soul, always calm without, like the black and gloomy surface of a poisonous morass.

One day M. Pascal learned the death of his father.

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The peddler's savings, considerably increased by skilful financial manipulation, had attained a very high figure. Once possessed of this capital, Pascal swore that he would amass a great fortune by untiring diligence and fortitude, by knowing what to do, and, still more, by knowing how to take ; for, argued he, one must risk something, and, if need be, go outside of the straight and narrow path of lawfulness. Our hero kept his oath. He left the house of Rousselot. Ability, chance, fraud, luck, adroitness, and the laws of the time all contributed to his success. He gained important sums, rewarding with cash the friendship of an agent, who, keeping him well informed, put it in his power to handle safely seventy thousand on the Exchange, and lay up almost two millions. A short time afterward an intelligent and adventurous broker, versed in the business of London, helped him to see the possibility of realising immense profit, by boldly engaging in railway speculations, then altogether new in England. Pascal went to London, engaged successfully in an enterprise which soon assumed unheard-of proportions, threw his whole fortune upon one cast of the die, and, realising in time, came back to France with fifteen millions. Then, as cool and prudent as he had been adventurous, and naturally endowed with great financial talent, his only thought was to continually increase this unexpected fortune ; he succeeded, availing himself of every opportunity with rare skill, living comfortably, satisfying, at any cost, his numerous sensual desires, but never attracting attention by any exterior display or luxury, and always dining at a public house. In this way he scarcely spent the fifth part of his income, which, furnishing new capital each year, constantly added to the fortune which successful speculation as constantly augmented.

Then, as we have said, came to Pascal his great and terrible day of reprisal.

This soul, hardened by so many years of humiliation

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and hatred, became implacable, and found a thousand cruel delights in making others feel the weight of the money yoke which he had worn so long.

His keenest suffering had come from the vassalage, the servitude, and complete effacement of self in which he had been held for so long a time under the tyranny of his opulent employers. Now, his pleasure was to impose this servitude on others,—on some, by exercising their natural servility, on others, by compelling them to submit to hard necessity, thus symbolising in himself the almighty power of money, holding all who came within his grasp in absolute slavery, from the petty merchant whom he commanded to the prince of royal blood who humbled himself to obtain a loan. This awful despotism, which the man who lends exercises over the man whose necessities force him to borrow, Pascal wielded and enjoyed with all the refinement and delicacy of an incredible barbarity. We hear often of the power of Satan over souls. M. Pascal was able to destroy or torture as many and more souls than Satan.

Once in his power, through credit, loan, or partnership,—often granted with a show of perfect good-nature, and not unfrequently offered with a duplicity which looked like generosity, though always on solid security,—a man belonged to himself no longer ; he had, as was commonly said, sold his soul to Satan-Pascal.

He calculated and arranged his bargains with a skill which seemed infernal.

A commercial crisis would arrive,—capital not be found, or at such exorbitant interest that merchants, at other times solvent and prompt in payment, saw themselves in extreme embarrassment, often upon the brink of failure. M. Pascal, perfectly instructed and certain of covering his advances by merchandise or property, granted or proposed assistance at enormous interest, with the invariable condition that he was to be reimbursed at his will, hastening to add that he would

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not exercise his right, inasmuch as his own advantage would be gained by keeping his money at interest; but by habit or caprice, as he argued, he always held to this express condition, to be reimbursed at his will.

The alternative was cruel indeed for the unhappy ones whom Satan-Pascal tempted: on one hand, the ruin of a prosperous industry; on the other, an unexpected aid, so easily offered that it might pass for a generous service. The impossibility of finding capital, even at ruinous rates, and the confidence which M. Pascal knew how to inspire, rendered the temptation most powerful, a temptation all the more seductive by the insinuating kindness of the multi-millionaire, who came, as he declared, as a financial providence to the assistance of honest, labouring people.

In a word, everything conspired to stifle suspicion; they accepted. From that time Pascal possessed them.

Beset by the fear of an immediate demand for repayment which must reduce them to a desperate condition from which they could not hope to rise, they had but one aim, to please M. Pascal, but one dread, to displease M. Pascal, who was master of their fate.

It not infrequently happened that our Satan did not at first use his power, and, by a refinement of wicked malice, would play the part of a kind man, a benefactor, taking a fiendish pleasure in hearing the benedictions with which his victims loaded him, leaving them for a long time in the error which led them to adore their benevolent friend; then, by degrees, according to his humour, he revealed himself slowly, never employing threats, rudeness, or passion, but, on the contrary, affecting an insinuating sweetness which in itself became frightful. Circumstances the most insignificant and puerile offered him a thousand means of tormenting the persons he held in his absolute power.

For instance, he would arrive at the house of one of his vassals, so to speak. Perhaps the man was going

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with his wife and children to some family reunion, long before arranged.

"I have come to dine with you without ceremony to-day, my friends," this Satan would say.

"My God, M. Pascal! how sorry we are! To-day is my mother's birthday, and you see we are just getting ready to go to dine with her. It is an anniversary we never fail to celebrate."

"Ah! that is very provoking, as I hoped to spend my evening with you."

"And do you think it is less annoying to us, dear M. Pascal?"

"Bah! you could very easily give up a family reunion for me. After all, your mother would not die if you were not there."

"Oh, my dear M. Pascal, that is impossible! It would be the first time since our marriage that we failed in this little family ceremony."

"Come, you surely will do that for me."

"But, M. Pascal —"

"I tell you, you will do that for your good M. Pascal, will you not?"

"We would like to do it with all our heart, but —"

"What! you refuse me that — me — the first thing I have ever asked of you?"

And M. Pascal put such an emphasis on the word *me* that the whole family suddenly trembled; they felt, as is vulgarly said, their master, and knowing of the strange caprice of the capitalist, they submitted sadly rather than offend the dreadful man upon whom their fate depended. They gave up the visit and improvised a dinner. They tried to smile, to have a cheerful air, and not to appear to regret the family festivity which they had renounced. But soon another fear begins to oppress their hearts; the dinner is becoming more and more sad and constrained. M. Pascal professes a sort of pathetic astonishment, as he complains with a sigh:

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"Come, now, I have interfered with your plans ; you feel bitterly toward me, alas ! I see it."

"Ah, M. Pascal!" cried the unhappy family, more and more disquieted, "how can you conceive such a thought?"

"Oh, I am not mistaken. I see it, I feel it, because my heart tells me so. Eh, my God ! just to think of it ! It is always a great wrong to put friendship to the proof, even in the smallest things, because they serve sometimes to measure great ones. I,—yes, I,—who counted on you as true and good friends!—yet it was a deception, perhaps."

And Satan-Pascal put his hand over his eyes, got up from the table, and went out of the house with a grieved and afflicted air, leaving the miserable inmates in unspeakable anguish, because he no longer believed in their friendship, and thought them ungrateful,—he who could in one moment plunge them in an abyss of woe by demanding the money he had so generously offered. The gratitude that he expected from them was their only assurance of his continued assistance.

We have insisted on these circumstances, trifling as they may seem perhaps, but whose result was so cruel, because we wished to give an example of how M. Pascal tortured his victims.

Let one judge after that of the degrees of torture to which he was capable of subjecting them, when so insignificant a fact as we have mentioned offered such food to his calculating cruelty.

He was a monster, it must be admitted.

There are Neros, unhappily, everywhere and in every age, but who would dare say that Pascal could have reached such a degree of perversity without the pernicious influences and terrible resentments which his soul, irritated by a degrading servitude, had nourished for so long a time ?

The word reprisal does not excuse the cruelty of this

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man; it explains itself. Man rarely becomes wicked without a cause. Evil owes its birth to evil.

M. Pascal thus portrayed, we will precede him by one hour to the home of M. Charles Dutertre.

CHAPTER V.

THE factory of M. Dutertre, devoted to the manufacture of locomotives for railroads, occupied an immense site in the Faubourg St. Marecau, and its tall brick chimneys, constantly smoking, designated it at a great distance.

M. Dutertre and his family lived in a small house separated from the workshops by a large garden.

At the moment we introduce the reader into this modest dwelling, an air of festivity reigned there ; every one in the house seemed to be occupied with hospitable preparation. A young and active servant had just finished arranging the table in the middle of the dining-room, the window of which looked out upon the garden, and which bordered upon a small kitchen separated from the landing-place by a glass partition, panes set in an unpolished frame. An old cook woman went to and fro with a bewildered air in this culinary laboratory, from which issued whiffs of appetising odours, which sometimes pervaded the dining-room.

In the parlour, furnished with walnut covered in yellow Utrecht velvet and curtains of white muslin, other preparations were going on. Two vases of white porcelain, ornamenting the chimneypiece, had just been filled with fresh flowers ; between these two vases, replacing the ornamental clock, was a miniature locomotive under a glass globe, a veritable masterpiece of mechanism and ironmongery. On the black pedestal of

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this trinket of iron, copper, and steel one could see engraved the words :

*To M. Charles Dutertre.
His grateful workmen.*

Téniers or Gérard Dow would have made a charming picture of the family group in this parlour.

A blind old man, with a venerable and melancholy face encircled by long white hair falling over his shoulders, was seated in an armchair, holding two children on his knees,—a little boy of three years old and a little girl of five,—two angels of beauty and grace.

The little boy, dark and rosy, with great black eyes as soft as velvet, every now and then would look at his pretty blue casimir shirt and white trousers with the utmost satisfaction, but was most of all delighted with his white silk stockings striped with crimson, and his black morocco shoes with ribbon bows.

The little girl, named Madeleine for an intimate friend of the mother who was godmother to the child, was fair and rosy, with lovely blue eyes, and wore a pretty white dress. Her shoulders and arms were bare, and her legs were only half covered by dainty Scotch socks. To tell how many dimples were in those shoulders, on those arms, and in those fat little cheeks, so red and fresh and smooth, would have required a mother's computation, and she could only have learned by the number of kisses she gave them.

Standing by and leaning on the back of the old blind man's chair, Madame Dutertre was listening with a mother's interest and earnestness to the chirping of the little warblers that the grandfather held on his knees, talking of this and of that, in that infantine jargon which mothers know how to translate with such rare sagacity.

Madame Sophie Dutertre was only twenty-five years

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old, and, although slightly marked by smallpox, had unusually regular and beautiful features. It would be difficult to imagine a more gracious or attractive countenance, a more refined or agreeable smile, which was the ideal of sweetness and amiability. Superb hair, teeth of pearl, a dazzling complexion, and an elegant stature rendered her a charming presence under any circumstances, and when she raised her large, bright, limpid eyes to her husband, who was then standing on the other side of the blind old grandfather, love and maternity gave to this tender glance an expression at the same time pathetic and passionate, for the marriage of Sophie and Charles Dutertre had been a marriage of love.

The only fault—if a fault could be said to pertain to Sophie Dutertre—was, as careful and fastidious as she was about the attire of her children, she gave very little attention to her own toilet. An unbecoming, badly made stuff dress disparaged her elegant figure; her little foot was by no means irreproachably shod, and her beautiful brown hair was arranged with as little taste as care.

Frank and resolute, intelligent and kind, such was the character of M. Dutertre, then about twenty-eight years old. His keen eye, full of fire, and his robust, yet slender figure announced an active, energetic nature. A civil engineer, a man of science and study, as capable of solving difficult problems with the pen as of handling the file and the iron hammer; knowing how to command as well as to execute; honouring and elevating manual labour and sometimes practising it, whether by example or encouragement; scrupulously just; loyal and confiding almost to temerity; paternal, firm and impartial toward his numerous workmen; possessing an antique simplicity of manner; enthusiastic in labour, and in love with his creatures of iron and copper and steel, his life was divided between the three great things which constitute the happiness of man,—love, family, and labour.

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Charles Dutertre had only one sorrow, the blindness of his father, and yet this affliction was the opportunity for such tender devotion, such delicate and constant care, that Dutertre and his wife endeavoured to console themselves in the thought that it enabled them to prove to the old man their affection and fidelity. Notwithstanding the preparations for the approaching festivity, Charles Dutertre had postponed shaving until the next day, and his working suit which he kept on showed here and there upon the gray cloth spots and stains and burns which gave evidence of his contact with the forge. His forehead was high and noble-looking, his hands, which were white and nervous, were somewhat blackened by the smoke of the workshops. He seemed to forget, in his laborious and untiring activity, or in the refreshing repose which succeeded it, that personal care which some men very properly never renounce.

Such were the persons assembled in the modest parlour of the little home. The two children, chatting incessantly and at the same time, tried to make themselves understood by their grandfather, who responded with the best will in the world, and, smiling sweetly, would ask them :

“ What did you say, my little Augustus, and what do you say, my little Madeleine ? ”

“ Will madame the interpreter have the kindness to translate this pretty chirping into common language ? ” said Charles Dutertre to his wife, as he laughed merrily.

“ Why, Charles, do you not understand ? ”

“ Not at all.”

“ Do you not understand the children, father ? ” said she to the old man.

“ I thought I heard something about Sunday dress,” said the old man, smiling, “ but it was so complicated that I gave up all hope of comprehending it.”

“ It was something very like that,— come, come,

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only mothers and grandfathers understand little children," said Sophie, triumphantly.

Then turning to the children, she said :

" My dears, did you not say to your grandfather, ' To-day is Sunday because we have on our pretty new clothes ' ? "

The little blonde Madeleine opened her great blue eyes wide, and bowed her curly head in the affirmative.

" You are the Champollion of mothers ! " cried Charles Dutertre, while the old man said to the two children :

" No, to-day is not Sunday, my children, but it is a feast-day."

Here Sophie was obliged to interfere again, and translate.

" They ask why it is a feast-day, father."

" Because we are going to have a friend visit us, and when a friend comes to see us, it is always a feast," replied the old man, with a smile somewhat constrained.

" Ah, we must not forget the purse," said Dutertre to his wife.

" Wait a moment," replied Sophie, gaily, to her husband, as she pointed to a little rose-coloured box on the table, " do you think that I, any more than you, could forget our good M. Pascal, our worthy benefactor ? "

The grandfather, turning to little Madeleine, said, as he kissed her brow.

" We are expecting M. Pascal,—you know M. Pascal."

Madeleine again opened her great blue eyes; her face took on an expression almost of fear, and shaking her little curly head sadly, she said :

" He is bad."

" M. Pascal ? " said Sophie.

" Oh, yes, very bad ! " replied the child.

" But," said the young mother, " my dear Madeleine, why do you think that M. Pascal is bad ? "

" Come, Sophie," said Charles Dutertre, smiling, " you

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are not going to stop to listen to this childish talk about our worthy friend, are you ?”

Strange enough, the old man’s countenance at once assumed a vague expression of disquietude, and whether he trusted the instinct and penetration of children, or whether he was influenced by another thought, far from making a jest of Madeleine’s words, as his son did, he leaned over the child, and said :

“ Tell us, my child, why M. Pascal is bad.”

The little blonde shook her head, and said, innocently :
“ Don’t know,— but, very sure, he is bad.”

Sophie, who felt a good deal like the grandfather on the subject of the wonderful sagacity of children, could not overcome a slight feeling of alarm, for there are secret, mysterious relations between a mother and the children of her blood. An indefinable presentiment, against which Sophie struggled with all her strength, because she thought it absurd and foolish, told her that the little girl had made no mistake in reading the character of M. Pascal, although she had heretofore esteemed him as the impersonation of goodness and generosity.

Charles Dutertre, never suspecting the impressions of his wife and father, replied, smiling :

“ Now it is my turn to give a lesson to this grandfather and this mother, who pretend to understand the prattle and feeling of children so well. Our excellent friend has a rough exterior, heavy eyebrows, and a black beard and dark skin and unprepossessing speech ; he is, in a word, a sort of benevolent churl, but he does not deserve the name of bad, even upon the authority of this little blonde.”

At this moment the servant entered, and said to her mistress :

“ Madame, Mlle. Hubert is here with her maid, and — ”

“ Antonine ? What good fortune !” said Sophie, rising immediately, and going to meet the young girl.

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"Madame," added the servant, mysteriously, "Agatha wants to know if M. Pascal likes his peas with sugar or bacon?"

"Charles!" called Sophie, merrily, to her husband, "this is a grave question, what do you think of it?"

"Make one dish of peas with sugar, and the other with bacon," replied Charles, thoughtfully.

"It takes mathematicians to solve problems," replied Sophie, then, taking her children by the hand, she added: "I want Antonine to see how large and pretty they are."

"But I hope you will persuade Mlle. Hubert to come in, or I must go after her."

"I am going to take the children to their nurse, and I will return with Antonine."

"Charles," said the old man, rising, when the young woman had disappeared, "give me your arm, please."

"Certainly, father; but M. Pascal will arrive before long."

"And you insist upon my being present, my son?"

"You know, father, all the respect that our friend has for you, and how glad he is to show it to you."

After a moment's silence, the old man replied:

"Do you know that, since you have dismissed your old cashier, Marcellange, he often visits M. Pascal?"

"This is the first time I have heard it."

"Does it not seem singular to you?"

"Yes, indeed."

"Listen to me, Charles, I —"

"I beg your pardon, father," replied Dutertre, interrupting the old man, "now I think of it, nothing is more natural; I have not seen our friend since I sent Marcellange away; Marcellange knows of our friendship for M. Pascal, and he perhaps has gone to see him, to beg him to intercede with me for him."

"It can be so explained," said the old man, thoughtfully. "Yet—"

"Well, father?"

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“ Your little girl’s impression struck me forcibly.”

“ Come, father,” replied Dutertre, smiling, “ you say that to compliment my wife. Unfortunately, she is not present to hear you. But I will report your gallantry to her.”

“ I say so, Charles,” replied the old man, in a solemn tone, “ because, as childish as it may appear, your little girl’s impression seems to me to have a certain weight, and when I recall some other circumstances, and think of the frequent interviews between Marcelange and M. Pascal, I confess to you that I feel in spite of myself a vague distrust of your friend.”

“ Oh, father, father,” replied Charles Dutertre, with emotion, “ of course you do not mean it, but you distress me very much. Doubt our generous benefactor, M. Pascal ! Ah, banish your suspicions, father, for this is the first sorrow I have felt in a long time. To suspect without proof, to be influenced by the passing impression of a little child,” added Dutertre, with all the warmth of his natural generosity, “ that is unjust, indeed !”

“ Charles !” said the old man, wounded by his son’s resentment.

“ Oh, pardon me, pardon me, father,” cried Dutertre, taking the old man’s hands in his own, “ I was too quick, forgive me ; for a moment friendship spoke louder than my respect for you.”

“ My poor Charles,” replied the old man, affectionately, “ Heaven grant that you may be right in differing from me, and, far from complaining of your readiness to defend a friend, I am glad of it. But I hear some one coming,— take me back to my room.”

At the moment M. Dutertre closed the door of the chamber where he had conducted the blind man, Mlle. Hubert entered the parlour accompanied by Madame Dutertre.

CHAPTER VI.

NOTWITHSTANDING the triteness of the mythological comparison, we must be pardoned for saying that never Hebe, the cupbearer to the gods of Olympus, in all the brilliancy of her superhuman beauty, united in herself more resplendent charms than did, in her terrestrial loveliness, the modest maiden, Antonine Hubert, whose love secret with Frantz M. Pascal had surprised.

What seemed most attractive in this young girl was the beauty of fifteen years and a half which combined the grace and freshness of the child with the budding charms of young womanhood,—enchanting age, still full of mysteries and chaste ignorances, a pure dawn, white and transparent, that the first palpitations of an innocent love would colour with the exquisite tint of the full-blown rose.

Such was the age of Antonine, and she had the charm and all the charms of that age.

To humanise our Hebe, we will make her descend from her pedestal, and, veiling her delicate and beautiful form, will clothe her in an elegant summer robe; a black silk mantle will hide the exquisite contour of her bust, and a straw hat, lined with silk as rosy as her cheeks, allowing us a view of her chestnut tresses, will serve as a frame for the oval face, as fresh, as fair, and as soft as that of the child she has just embraced.

As she entered the parlour with Sophie, mademoiselle blushed slightly, for she had the timidity of her fifteen years; then, put at ease by the cordial reception of Dutertre and his wife, she said to the latter, with a sort

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of deference drawn from their old relations of child and mother, as they were called in the boarding-school where they had been brought up together :

“ You do not know the good fortune which brings me here, Sophie.”

“ A good fortune! — so much the better, my little Antonine ! ”

“ A letter from St. Madeleine,” replied the young girl, drawing an envelope from her pocket.

“ Really ! ” exclaimed Sophie, blushing with joy and surprise, as she reached her hand impatiently for the letter.

“ What, Mlle. Antonine,” said Charles Dutertre, laughing, “ you are in correspondence with paradise ? Though if it is true I ought not to be astonished, inasmuch — ”

“ Be silent, M. Tease,” interrupted Sophie, “ and do not make jokes about Antonine’s and my best friend.”

“ I will be careful, — but what is the meaning of this name, St. Madeleine ? ”

“ Why, Charles, have I not told you a thousand times about my school friend, Madeleine Silveyra, who is godmother by proxy of our little one ? What are you thinking of ? ”

“ I have a very good memory, my dear Sophie,” replied Dutertre, “ because I have not forgotten that this young Mexican had such a singular kind of beauty that she inspired as much surprise as admiration.”

“ The very same lady, my dear ; after me, Madeleine acted as a mother to Antonine, as we said at school, where each large girl had the care of a child from ten to eleven years old ; so, when I left school, I confided dear Antonine to the affection of St. Madeleine.”

“ It is just that surname which was the cause of my mistake,” replied Dutertre, “ a surname which seems to me very ambitious or very humble for such a pretty person, for she must be near your age.”

“ They gave Madeleine the name of saint at school

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because she deserved it, M. Dutertre," replied Antonine, with all the seriousness of fifteen years, "and while she was my little mother they continued to call her St. Madeleine, as they did in Sophie's time."

"Was this Mlle. St. Madeleine a very austere devotee?" asked Dutertre.

"Madeleine, like all people of her country,—we gave our French form to her name of Magdalena,—gave herself to a particular devotion. She had chosen the Christ, and her adoration for her Saviour became an ecstasy," replied Sophie; "besides, she united to this enthusiastic devotion the warmest heart and the most interesting, enjoyable mind in the world. But I pray you, Charles, let me read her letter. I am impatient. Just imagine, the first letter after two years of separation! Antonine and I felt a little bitter at her silence, but you see the first remembrance we receive from her disarms us."

And taking the letter which Antonine had just given her, Sophie read, with an emotion which increased with every line.

"Dear Madeleine, always tender and affectionate, always witty and bright, always so appreciative of any remembrance of the past. After a few days' rest at Marseilles, where she has arrived from Veniee, she comes to Paris, almost at the same time her letter arrives, and she thinks only of the happiness of seeing Sophie, her friend, and her little girl Antonine, and she writes in haste to both of us, and signs herself as of old, St. Madeleine."

"Then she is not married?" asked Charles Dutertre.

"I do not know, my dear," replied his wife, "she signs only her baptismal name."

"But why should I ask such an absurd question?—think of a married saint!"

At that moment the servant entered, and, stopping on the threshold of the door, made a significant sign to her mistress, who replied :

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" You can speak, Julie, Mlle. Antonine is a part of the family."

" Madame," said the servant, " Agatha wants to know if she must put the chicken on the spit if M. Pascal does not come?"

" Certainly," said Madame Dutertre, " M. Pascal is a little late, but we expect him every minute."

" You are expecting some one, then, Sophie?" asked Antonine, when the servant retired. " Well, good-bye, I will see you again," added the young girl, with a sigh. " I did not come only to bring St. Madeleine's letter, I wanted to have a long chat with you. I will see you again to-morrow, dear Sophie."

" Not at all, my little Antonine. I use my authority as mother to keep my dear little girl and have her breakfast with us. It is a sort of family feast. Is it because your place was not ready, my child?"

" Come, Mlle. Antonine," said Charles, " do us the kindness to stay."

" You are a thousand times too good, M. Dutertre, but, really, I cannot accept."

" Then," replied he, " I am going to employ the greatest means of seducing you; in a word, if you will stay, you shall see the generous man who, of his own accord, came to our rescue this day a year ago, for this is the anniversary of that noble action that we are celebrating to-day."

Sophie, having forgotten the presentiment awakened in her mind by the words of her little girl, added:

" Yes, my little Antonine, at the very moment, the critical moment, when ruin threatened our business, M. Pascal said to Charles: ' Monsieur, I do not know you personally, but I know you are as just as you are laborious and intelligent; you need fifty thousand to put your business in a good condition. I offer it to you as a friend, accept it as a friend; as to interest, we will estimate that afterward, and still as a friend.' "

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"That was to act nobly, indeed!" said Antonine.

"Yes," said Charles Dutertre, with profound emotion, "for it is not only my industry which he has saved, but it was the labour of the numerous workmen I employ, it was the repose of my father's old age, the happiness of my wife, the future of my children. Oh, stay with us, stay, Mlle. Antonine, the sight of such a good man is so rare, so sweet — But wait, there he is!" exclaimed M. Dutertre, as he saw M. Pascal pass the parlour window.

"I am much impressed with all Sophie and you have told me, M. Dutertre, and I regret I cannot see this generous man to whom you owe so much, but breakfast would detain me too long. I must return early. My uncle expects me, and he has passed a very painful night; in these attacks of suffering he always wants me near him, and these attacks come at any time."

Then, taking Sophie by the hand, the young girl added :

"Can I see you again soon?"

"To-morrow or day after, my dear little Antonine, I am coming to see you, and we will talk as long as you like."

The door opened ; M. Pascal entered.

Antonine embraced her friend, and Sophie said to the financier, with affectionate cordiality :

"Permit me, will you not, M. Pascal, to take leave of mademoiselle. I need not say that I will hasten to return."

"No need of ceremony, my dear Madame Dutertre," stammered M. Pascal, in spite of his assurance astonished to see Antonine again, and he followed her with an intense, surly gaze until she had left the room.

CHAPTER VII.

M. PASCAL, at the sight of Antonine, whom he saw for the second time that morning, was, as we have said, a moment bewildered with surprise and admiration before this fresh and innocent beauty.

"At last, here you are!" said Charles Dutertre, effusively extending both hands to M. Pascal when he found himself alone with him. "Do you know we were beginning to question your promptness? All the week my wife and I have looked forward with joy to this day, for, after the anniversary of the birth of our children, the day that we celebrate with the most pleasure is the one from which dates, thanks to you, the security of their future. It is so good, so sweet to feel, by the gratitude of our hearts, the lofty nobleness of those generous deeds which honour him who offers as much as him who accepts."

M. Pascal did not appear to have heard the words of M. Dutertre, and said to him:

"Who is that young girl who just went out of here?"

"Mlle. Antonine Hubert."

"Is she related to President Hubert, who has lately been so ill?"

"She is his niece."

"Ah!" said Pascal, thoughtfully.

"You know if my father were not with us," replied M. Dutertre, smiling, "our little festivity would not be complete. I am going to inform him of your arrival, my dear M. Pascal."

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And as he stepped to the door of the old man's chamber, M. Pascal stopped him with a gesture, and said :

“ Does not President Hubert reside — ”

And as he hesitated, Dutertre added :

“ In Faubourg St. Honoré. The garden joins that of the Élysée-Bourbon.”

“ Has this young girl lived with her uncle long ? ”

Dutertre, quite surprised at this persistent inquiry concerning Antonine, answered :

“ About three months ago M. Hubert went to Nice for Antonine, where she lived after the death of her parents.”

“ And is Madame Dutertre very intimate with this young person ? ”

“ They were together at boarding-school, where Sophie was a sort of mother to her, and ever since they have been upon the most affectionate terms.”

“ Ah ! ” said Pascal, again relapsing into deep thought.

This man possessed a great and rare faculty which had contributed to the accumulation of his immense fortune,— he could with perfect ease detach himself from any line of thought, and enter upon a totally different set of ideas. Thus, after the interview of Frantz and Antonine which he had surprised, and which had excited him so profoundly, he was able to talk with the archduke upon business affairs, and to torture him with deliberate malice.

In the same way, after this meeting with Antonine at the house of Dutertre, he postponed, so to speak, his violent resentment and his plans regarding the young girl, and said, with perfect good-nature, to Sophie's husband :

“ While we wait for the return of your wife, I have a little favour to ask of you.”

“ At last ! ” exclaimed Dutertre, rubbing his hands with evident satisfaction ; “ better late than never.”

“ You had a cashier named Marcellange ? ”

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“Yes, unfortunately.”

“Unfortunately ?”

“He committed, while in my employ, not an act of dishonesty, for I should not, at any price, have saved him from the punishment he merited ; but he was guilty of an indelicacy under circumstances which proved to me that the man was a wretch, and I dismissed him.”

“Marcelange told me, in fact, that you sent him away.”

“You are acquainted with him ?” replied Dutertre, in surprise, as he recalled his father’s words.

“Some days ago he came to see me. He wished to get a position in the Durand house.”

“He ? Among such honourable people ?”

“Why not ? He was employed by you.”

“But, as I have told you, my dear M. Pascal, I sent him away as soon as his conduct was known to me.”

“I understand perfectly. Only, as he is without a position, he must have, in order to enter the Durand house, a letter of recommendation from you, as the Durands are not willing to accept the poor fellow otherwise ; now this letter, my dear Dutertre, I come honestly to ask of you.”

After a moment of astonishment, Dutertre said, with a smile :

“After all, I ought not to be astonished. You are so kind ! This man is full of artifice and falsity, and knows how to take advantage of your confidence.”

“I believe, really, that Marcelange is very false, very sly ; but that need not prevent your giving me the letter I ask.”

Dutertre could not believe that he had heard aright, or that he understood M. Pascal, and replied :

“I beg your pardon, sir. I have just told you that—”

“You have reason to complain of an act of indelicacy

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on the part of this fellow, but, bah ! what does that matter ?”

“ What ! M. Pascal, you ask, what does it matter ? Know then, that, in my eyes, this man’s act was even more blamable than fraud in money matters.”

“ I believe you, my dear Dutertre, I believe you ; there is no better judge of honourable dealing than yourself. Marcelange seems to me truly a cunning rascal, and, if I must tell you, it is on that account that I insist—insist very much on his being recommended by you.”

“ Honestly, M. Pascal, I believe that I should be acting a dishonourable part in aiding the entrance of Marcelange into a thoroughly respectable house.”

“ Come, now, do this for me ! ”

“ You are not speaking seriously, M. Pascal ? ”

“ I am speaking very seriously.”

“ After what I have just confided to you ? ”

“ My God ! yes, why not ? ”

“ You ! you ! honour and loyalty itself ! ”

“ I, the impersonation of honour and loyalty, ask you to give me this letter.”

Dutertre looked at M. Pascal, bewildered ; then, after a moment’s reflection, he replied, in a tone of affectionate reproach :

“ Ah, sir, after a year has elapsed, was this proof necessary ? ”

“ What proof ? ”

“ To propose an unworthy action to me, that you might feel assured that I deserved your confidence.”

“ My dear Dutertre, I repeat to you that I must have this letter. It concerns an affair which is very important to me.”

M. Pascal was speaking seriously. Dutertre could no longer doubt it. He then remembered the words of his father, the antipathy of his little girl, and, seized with a vague dread, he replied, in a constrained voice :

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“So, monsieur, you forget the grave responsibility which would rest upon me if I did what you desire.”

“Eh, my God! my brave Dutertre, if we only asked easy things of our friends!”

“You ask of me an impossible thing, monsieur.”

“So, then, you refuse to do it for me, do you?”

“M. Pascal,” said Dutertre, with an accent at the same time firm and full of emotion, “I owe you everything. There is not a day that I, my wife, and my father do not recall the fact that, one year ago, without your unexpected succour, our own ruin, and the ruin of many other people, would have been inevitable. All that gratitude can inspire of respect and affection we feel for you. Every possible proof of devotion we are ready to give you with pleasure, with happiness, but—”

“One word more, and you will understand me,” interrupted M. Pascal. “Since I must tell you, Dutertre, I have a special interest in having some one who belongs to me — entirely to me, you understand, entirely mine — in the business house of Durand. Now, you can comprehend that, holding Marcé lange by this letter which you will give me for him, and by what I know of his antecedents, I can make him my creature, my blind instrument. This is entirely between us, my dear Dutertre, and, counting on your absolute discretion, I will go further even, and I will tell you that—”

“Not a word more on this subject, sir, I beg,” exclaimed Dutertre, with increasing surprise and distress, for up to that time he had believed Pascal to be a man of incorruptible integrity. “Not a word more. There are secrets whose confidence one does not wish to accept.”

“Why?”

“Because they might become very embarrassing, sir.”

“Really! The confidences of an old friend can

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become an annoyance ! Very well, I will keep them. Then, give me this letter without any more explanations."

"I repeat to you, sir, that it is impossible for me to do so."

M. Pascal bit his lips and unconsciously knit his eyebrows ; as surprised as he was angry at the refusal of Dutertre, he could scarcely believe that a man who was dependent upon him could have the audacity to oppose his will, or the courage to sacrifice the present and the future to a scruple of honour.

However, as he had a special interest in this letter, he replied, with a tone of affectionate reproach :

"What ! You refuse me that, my dear Dutertre,— refuse me, your friend ?"

"I refuse you above all,—you who have had faith enough in my incorruptible honesty to advance for me, without even knowing me, a considerable amount."

"Come, my dear Dutertre, do not make me more adventurous than I am. Are not your honesty, your intelligence, your interest even, and at any rate the material in your factory, sufficient security for my capital ? Am I not always in a safe position, by the right I reserve to myself, to exact repayment at will ? A right which I will not exercise in your case for a long time, as I know. I am too much interested in you to do that, Dutertre," as he saw astonishment and anguish depicted in Dutertre's face, "but, indeed, let us suppose,—oh, it will not come to that, thank God,—but let us suppose that, in the constrained condition and trying crisis in which business is at present, I should say to you to-day, M. Dutertre, I shall need my money in a month, and I withdraw my credit from you."

"Great God !" exclaimed Dutertre, terrified, staggered at the bare supposition of such a disaster, "I would go into bankruptcy ! It would be my ruin, the loss of my business ; I would be obliged, perhaps, to work with my

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own hands, if I could find employment, to support my infirm father, my wife, and my children."

"Will you be silent, you wicked man, and not put such painful things before my eyes! You are going to spoil my whole day!" exclaimed M. Pascal, with irresistible good-nature, taking Dutertre's hands in his own. "Do you speak in this way, when I, like you, am making a festivity of this morning? Well, well, what is the matter? How pale you look, now!"

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Dutertre, wiping the drops of cold sweat from his brow, "but at the very thought of such an unexpected blow which would strike all that I hold dearest in the world, my honour, my family, my labour — Ah, yes, monsieur, you are right, let us drive this thought far from us, it is too horrible."

"Eh! my God, that is just what I was saying to you; do not let us make this charming day a sad one. So, to finish the matter," added M. Pascal, cheerfully, "let us hurry over business affairs, let us empty our bag, as the saying is. Give me this letter, and we will talk no more about it."

Dutertre started, a frightful pain wrung his heart, and he replied :

"Such persistence astonishes and distresses me, monsieur. I repeat to you it is absolutely impossible for me to do what you ask."

"What a child you are! my persistent request proves to you how much importance I attach to this affair."

"That may be, monsieur."

"And why do I attach such importance to it, my brave Dutertre? It is because this matter interests you as well as myself."

"What do you mean, monsieur?"

"Eh! without doubt. My combination with the house of Durand failing, since your refusal would prevent my employing this knave Marcelange, as I desire (you do not wish to know my secrets, so I am forced to keep

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them), perhaps I should be compelled for certain reasons," added M. Pascal, pronouncing his words slowly, and looking at his victim with a sharp, cold eye, "I say, perhaps I should be compelled — and it would draw the blood from my heart — to demand the repayment of my capital, and withdraw my credit from you."

"Oh, my God!" exclaimed Dutertre, clasping his hands and looking as pale as a ghost.

"So you see, bad man, in what an atrocious position you put yourself. Force me to an action which, I repeat to you, would tear my soul —"

"But, monsieur, a moment ago you assured me that —"

"Zounds! my intention would be to let you keep this wretched capital as long as possible. You pay me the interest with remarkable punctuality, it was perfectly well placed, and, thanks to our terms of liquidation, you would have been free in ten years, and I should have made a good investment in doing you a service."

"Really, monsieur," murmured Dutertre, overwhelmed, "such were your promises, if not written, at least verbal, and the generosity of your offer, the loyalty of your character, all gave me perfect confidence. God grant that I may not have to consider myself the most rash, the most stupid man, to have trusted your word!"

"As to that, Dutertre, you can be at peace with yourself; at that period of commercial crisis, at least as terrible as it is to-day, you could not have found anywhere the capital that I offered you at such a moderate rate."

"I know it, monsieur."

"Then you can, and you must, indeed, by sheer force of necessity, accept the condition I put upon this loan."

"But, monsieur," cried Dutertre, with inexpressible alarm, "I appeal to your honour! You have expressly promised me that —"

"Eh, my God, yes, I promised you, saving the superior force of events; and unfortunately your refusal

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to give this poor little letter creates an event of stronger force which places me in the painful—the grievous necessity of asking you for repayment of my money."

"But, monsieur, it is an unworthy action that you ask me to do, think of it."

At this moment was heard the sweet ringing laughter of Sophie, who was approaching the parlour.

"Ah, monsieur," said her husband, "not a word of this before my wife, because it may not be your final resolve. I hope that—"

Charles Dutertre could not finish, because Sophie had entered the parlour.

The unhappy man could only make a supplicating gesture to Pascal, who responded to it by a sign of sympathetic intelligence.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHEN Sophie Dutertre entered the parlour, where were seated her husband and M. Pascal, the gracious countenance of the young woman, more flushed than usual, the light throbbing of her bosom, and her moist eyes, all testified to a recent fit of hilarious laughter.

“ Ah, ah, Madame Dutertre ! ” said M. Pascal, cheerfully. “ I heard you distinctly ; you were laughing like a lunatic.”

Then, turning to Dutertre, who was trying to hide his intense distress and to hold on to a last hope, he said :

“ How gay happiness makes these young women ! Nothing like the sight of them puts joy in the heart, does it, my brave Dutertre ? ”

“ I was laughing in spite of myself, I assure you, my dear M. Pascal,” replied Sophie.

“ In spite of yourself ? ” answered our hero. “ Why, does some sorrow — ”

“ Sorrow ? Oh, no, thank God ! But I was more disposed to tenderness than gaiety. This dear Antonine, if you only knew her, Charles,” added the young woman, with sweet emotion, addressing her husband. “ I cannot tell you how she has moved me, what a pure, touching confession she has made to me, for the heart of the poor child was too full, and she could not go away without telling me all.”

And a tear of sympathy moistened Sophie’s beautiful eyes.

At the name of Antonine, M. Pascal, notwithstanding his great control over himself, started. His thoughts

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concerning this young girl, for a moment postponed, returned more ardent, more persistent than ever, and as Sophie was wiping her eyes he threw upon her a penetrating glance, trying to divine what he might hope from her, in reference to the plan he meditated.

Sophie soon spoke, addressing her husband :

“ But, Charles,— I will relate it all to you, after awhile,— while I was absorbed in thinking of my interview with Antonine, my little Madeleine came to me, and said in her baby language such ridiculous things that I could not keep from bursting into laughter. But, pardon me, M. Pascal, your heart will understand and excuse, I know, all a mother’s weakness.”

“ Do you say that to me,” replied Pascal, cordially, “ a bachelor,— you say it to me, a good old fellow ?”

“ That is true,” added Sophie, affectionately, “ but we love you so much here, you see, that we think you are right to call yourself a good old fellow. Ask Charles if he will contradict my words.”

Dutertre replied with a constrained smile, and he had the strength and the courage to restrain his feelings before his wife to such a degree that she, occupied with M. Pascal, had not the least suspicion of her husband’s anxiety. So, going to the table and taking up the purse she had embroidered, she presented it to M. Pascal, and said to him, in a voice full of emotion :

“ My dear M. Pascal, this purse is the fruit of my evening work,— evenings that I have spent here with my husband, with his excellent father, and with my children. If each one of these little steel beads could speak, all would tell you how many times your name has been pronounced among us, with all the affection and gratitude it deserves.”

“ Ah, thank you, thank you, my dear Madame Dutertre,” replied Pascal, “ I cannot tell you how much I appreciate this pretty present, this lovely remembrance,— only, you see, it embarrasses me a little.”

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“How is that?”

“You come to give me something, and I came to ask you something.”

“What happiness! Ask, ask, by all means, dear M. Pascal.”

Then turning to her husband, with surprise, she said:

“Charles, what are you doing there, seated before that desk?”

“M. Pascal will excuse me. I just recollect that I had neglected to examine some notes relative to important business,” replied Dutertre, turning the leaves of some papers, to keep himself in countenance, and to hide from his wife, to whom he had turned his back, the pain which showed itself in his face.

“My dear,” said Sophie, in a tone of tender reproach; “can you not lay aside work now and wait until—”

“Madame Dutertre, I shall rebel if you disturb your husband on my account,” cried M. Pascal, “do I not know the exactness of business? Come, come, happy woman that you are, thanks to the indefatigable labour of brave Dutertre, who stands to-day at the head of his business.”

“And who has encouraged him in his zeal for work, but you, M. Pascal? If Charles is as you say at the head of his industry, if our future and that of our children is ever assured, do we not owe it to you?”

“My dear Madame Dutertre, you confuse me so that I shall not know how to ask the little service I expect from you.”

“Oh, I forgot it,” replied Sophie, smiling, “but we were speaking of more important services that you have rendered us, were we not? But tell us quick, quick,—what is it?” said the young woman, with an eagerness which gave her an additional charm.

“What I am going to tell you will surprise you, perhaps?”

“So much the better, I adore surprises.”

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"Ah, well, the isolation of bachelor life weighs upon me, and —"

"And?"

"I wish to get married."

"Truly!"

"Does it astonish you? I am sure it does."

"You are entirely mistaken, for in my opinion you ought to get married."

"Pray, why?"

"How often I have said to myself, sooner or later this good M. Pascal, who lives so much by his heart, will enjoy the sweets of family life, and, if I must confess my vain presumption," added Sophie, "I said to myself, it is impossible that the sight of the happiness Charles and I enjoy should not some day suggest the idea of marriage to M. Pascal. Now, was I not happy in foreseeing your intention?"

"Have your triumph, then, dear Madame Dutertre, because, in fact, seduced by your example and that of your husband, I desire to make, as you two did, a marriage of love."

"Can any other marriage be possible?" replied Sophie, shrugging her shoulders with a most graceful movement, and, without reflecting upon the thirty-eight years of M. Pascal, she added:

"And you are loved?"

"My God, that depends on you."

"On me?"

"Absolutely."

"On me?" exclaimed Sophie, with increasing surprise. "Do you hear, Charles, what M. Pascal says."

"I hear," replied Dutertre, who, not less astonished than his wife, was listening with involuntary anxiety.

"How can I, M. Pascal, how can I make you loved?" asked Sophie.

"You can do so, my dear Madame Dutertre."

"Although it seems incomprehensible to me, bless

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God for it. If I have the magic power you attribute to me, my dear M. Pascal," replied Sophie, with her sweetest smile, "then you will be loved, as you deserve to be."

"Counting on your promise, then, I will not travel four roads, but confess at once, my dear Madame Dutertre, that I am in love with Mlle. Antonine Hubert."

"Antonine!" exclaimed Sophie, astounded; while Dutertre, seated before his desk, turned abruptly to his wife, whose astonishment he shared.

"Antonine!" replied Sophie, as if she could not believe what she had heard. "You love Antonine!"

"Yes, it is she. I met her to-day in your house, for the fourth time, only I have never spoken to her. However, my mind is made up, for I am one of those people who decide quickly and by instinct. For instance, when it was necessary for me to come to the aid of this brave Dutertre, the thing was done in two hours. Well, the ravishing beauty of Mlle. Antonine, the purity of her face, a something, I know not what, tells me that this young person has the best qualities in the world,—all has contributed to render me madly in love with her, and to desire in a marriage of love, like yours, my dear Madame Dutertre, that inward happiness, those joys of the heart, that you believe me worthy of knowing and enjoying."

"Monsieur," said Sophie, with painful embarrassment, "permit me —"

"One word more, it is love at first sight, you will say,—that may be, but there are twenty examples of love as sudden as they are deep. Besides, as I have told you, I am plainly a man of instinct, of presentiment; with a single glance of the eye, I have always judged a thing good or bad. Why should I not follow in marriage a method which has always perfectly succeeded with me? I have told you that it depends entirely on you to make Mlle. Antonine love me. I will explain. At fifteen

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years, and she seems hardly to be so old as that, young girls have no wills of their own. You have acted as mother to Mlle. Antonine, as Dutertre has told me; you possess great influence over her, nothing would be more easy, by talking to her of me in a certain manner, when you shall have presented me to her, and that can be not later than to-morrow, can it not? I repeat, it will be easy for you to induce her to share my love, and to marry me. If I owe you this happiness, my dear Madame Dutertre, wait and see," added Pascal, with a tone full of emotion and sincerity. " You speak of gratitude? Well, that which you have toward me would be ingratitude, compared with what I would feel toward you!"

Sophie had listened to M. Pascal with as much grief as surprise; for she believed, and she had reason to believe, in the reality of the love, or rather the ardent desire for possession that this man felt; so she replied, with deep feeling, for it cost her much to disappoint hopes which seemed to her honourable:

" My poor M. Pascal, you must see that I am distressed not to be able to render you the first service you ask of me. I need not tell you how deeply I regret it."

" What is impossible in it?"

" Believe me, do not think of this marriage."

" Does not Mlle. Antonine deserve—"

" Antonine is an angel. I have known her from infancy. There is not a better heart, a better character, in the world."

" What you tell me, my dear Madame Dutertre, would suffice to augment my desire, if that could be done."

" I say again, this marriage is impossible."

" Well, tell me why."

" In the first place, think of it, Antonine is only fifteen and a half, and you—"

" I am thirty-eight. Is it that?"

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“ The difference of age is very great, you must confess, and as I would not advise my daughter or my sister to make a marriage so disproportionate, I cannot advise Antonine to do so, because I would not at any price make your unhappiness or hers.”

“ Oh, make yourself easy ! I will answer for my own happiness.”

“ And that of Antonine ?”

“ Bah ! bah ! for a few years, more or less — ”

“ I married for love, my dear M. Pascal. I do not comprehend other marriages. Perhaps it is wrong, but indeed I think so, and I ought to tell you so, since you consult me.”

“ According to you, then, I am not capable of pleasing Mlle. Antonine ?”

“ I believe that, like Charles and myself, and like all generous hearts, she would appreciate the nobility of your character, but — ”

“ Permit me again, my dear Madame Dutertre, — a child of fifteen years has no settled ideas on the subject of marriage ; and Mlle. Antonine has a blind confidence in you. Present me to her ; tell her all sorts of good about the good man, Pascal. The affair is sure, — if you wish to do it, you can.”

“ Hear me, my dear M. Pascal, this conversation grieves me more than I can tell you, and to put an end to it I will trust a secret to your discretion and your loyalty.”

“ Very well, what is this secret ?”

“ Antonine loves, and is loved. Ah, M. Pascal, nothing could be purer or more affecting than this love, and, for many reasons, I am certain it will assure Antonine’s happiness. Her uncle’s health is precarious, and should the poor child lose him she would be obliged to live with relatives who, not without reason, inspire her with aversion. Once married according to the dictate of her heart, she can hope for a happy future, for

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her warm affection is nobly placed. You must see, then, my dear M. Pascal, that, even with my influence, you would have no chance of success, and how can I give you my influence, with the approval of my conscience, leaving out of consideration the disparity of age, which, in my opinion, is an insuperable objection? I am sure, and I do not speak lightly, that the love which Antonine both feels and inspires ought to make her happy throughout her life."

At this confirmation of Antonine's love for Frantz, a secret already half understood by M. Pascal, he was filled with rage and resentment, which was all the more violent for reason of the refusal of Madame Dutertre, who declined to enter into his impossible plans; but he restrained himself with a view of attempting a last effort. Failing in that, he resolved to take a terrible revenge. So, with apparent calmness, he replied:

"Ah, so Mlle. Antonine is in love! Well, so be it; but we know, my dear Madame Dutertre, what these grand passions of young girls are,—a straw fire. You can blow it out; this beautiful love could not resist your influence."

"I assure you, M. Pascal, I would not try to influence Antonine upon this subject, for it would be useless."

"You think so?"

"I am certain of it."

"Bah! it is always worth while to try."

"But I tell you, sir, that Antonine —"

"Is in love! I understand, and more, the good old bachelor Pascal is thirty-eight, and evidently not handsome, but on the other hand he has some handsome little millions, and when this evening (for you will see her this evening, will you not? I count on it) you make this unsophisticated maiden comprehend that, if love is a good thing, money is still better, for love passes and money stays, she will follow your counsel, dismiss her lover to-morrow, and I will have no more to

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say but ‘Glory and thanks to you, my dear Madame Dutertre !’”

Sophie stared at M. Pascal in amazement. Her womanly sensitivity was deeply shocked, and her instinct told her that a man who could talk as M. Pascal had done was not the man of good feeling and rectitude that she had believed him to be.

At this moment, too, Dutertre rose from his chair, showing in his countenance the perplexity which agitated his mind; for the first time, his wife observed the alteration of his expression, and exclaimed as she advanced to meet him :

“ My God ! Charles, how pale you are ! Are you in pain ?”

“ No, Sophie, nothing is the matter with me,—only a slight headache.”

“ But I tell you something else is the matter. This pallor is not natural. Oh, M. Pascal, do look at Charles !”

“ Really, my good Dutertre, you do not appear at your ease.”

“ Nothing is the matter, sir,” replied Dutertre, with an icy tone which increased Sophie’s undefined fear.

She looked in silence, first at her husband, and then at M. Pascal, trying to discern the cause of the change that she saw and feared.

“ Well, my dear Dutertre,” said M. Pascal, “ you have heard our conversation ; pray join me in trying to make your dear and excellent wife comprehend that mademoiselle, notwithstanding her foolish, childish love, could not find a better party than myself.”

“ I share my wife’s opinion on this subject, monsieur.”

“ What ! You wicked man ! you, too !”

“ Yes, monsieur.”

“ Pray consider that — ”

“ My wife has told you, sir. We made a marriage of

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love, and, like her, I believe that love marriages are the only happy ones."

"To make merchandise of Antonine! I, counsel her to be guilty of an act of shocking meanness, a marriage of interest! to sell herself, in a word, when but an hour ago she confessed her pure and noble love to me! Ah, monsieur, I thought you had a higher opinion of me!"

"Come, come, now, my dear Dutertre, you are a man of sense, confess that these reasons are nothing but romance; help me to convince your wife."

"I repeat, monsieur, that I think as she does."

"Ah," exclaimed M. Pascal, "I did not expect to find here friends so cold and indifferent to what concerned me."

"Sir," exclaimed Sophie, "that reproach is unjust."

"Unjust! alas, I wish it were; but, indeed, I have too much reason to think differently. But a moment ago, your husband refused one of my requests, and now it is you. Ah, it is sad — sad. What can I rely upon after this?"

"Refused what?" said Sophie to her husband, more and more disquieted. "What does he mean, Charles?"

"It is not necessary to mention it, my dear Sophie."

"I think, on the contrary," replied Pascal, "that it would be well to tell your wife, my dear Dutertre, and have her opinion."

"Sir!" exclaimed Dutertre, clasping his hands in dismay.

"Come! is it not a marriage of love?" said Pascal, "you do not have any secrets from each other!"

"Charles, I beseech you, explain to me the meaning of all this. Ah, I saw plainly enough that you were suffering. Monsieur, has anything happened between you and Charles?" said she to Pascal, in a tone of entreaty. "I implore you to tell me."

"My God! a very simple thing happened. You can judge of it yourself, madame —"

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“ Monsieur ! ” cried Dutertre, “ in the name of the gratitude we owe you, in the name of pity, not one word more, I beseech you, for I can never believe that you will persist in your resolution. And then, what good does it do to torture my wife with needless alarm ? ”

Then, turning to Madame Dutertre, he said :

“ Compose yourself, Sophie, I beg you.”

The father Dutertre, hearing the sound of voices as he sat in his chamber, suddenly opened his door, made two steps into the parlour, extending his hands before him, and cried, trembling with excitement :

“ Charles ! Sophie. My God ! what is the matter ? ”

“ My father ! ” whispered Dutertre, wholly overcome.

“ The old man ! ” said Pascal. “ Good ! that suits me ! ”

CHAPTER IX.

A MOMENT'S silence followed the entrance of the old blind man into the parlour.

Dutertre went quickly to meet his father, took hold of his trembling hand, and said, as he pressed it tenderly :

"Calm yourself, father, it is nothing ; a simple discussion, a little lively. Let me take you back to your chamber."

"Charles," said the old man, shaking his head sadly, "your hand is cold, you are nervous, your voice is changed ; something has happened which you wish to hide from me."

"You are not mistaken, sir," said Pascal to the old man. "Your son is hiding something from you, and in his interest, in yours, and in the interest of your daughter-in-law and her children, you ought not to be ignorant of it."

"But M. Pascal, can nothing touch your heart ?" cried Charles Dutertre. "Are you without pity, without compassion ?"

"It is because I pity your obstinate folly, and that of your wife, my dear Dutertre, that I wish to appeal from it, to the good sense of your respectable father."

"Charles," cried Sophie, "however cruel the truth may be, tell it. This doubt, this agony, is beyond my endurance !"

"My son," added the old man, "be frank, as you have always been, and we will have courage."

"You see, my dear Dutertre," persisted M. Pascal, "your worthy father himself wishes to know the truth."

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"Monsieur," answered Dutertre, in a broken voice, looking at Pascal with tears which he could hardly restrain, "be good, be generous, as you have been until to-day. Your power is immense, I know; with one word you can plunge us in distress, in disaster; but with one word, too, you can restore to us the peace and happiness which we have owed to you. I implore you, do not be pitiless."

At the sight of the tears, which, in spite of his efforts to control, rose to the eyes of Dutertre, a man so resolute and energetic, Sophie detected the greatness of the danger, and, turning to M. Pascal, said, in a heart-rending voice :

"My God! I do not know the danger with which you threaten us, but I am afraid, oh, I am afraid, and I implore you also, M. Pascal."

"After having been our saviour," cried Dutertre, drying the tears which escaped in spite of him, "surely you will not be our executioner!"

"Your executioner!" repeated Pascal. "Please God, my poor friends, it is not I, it is you who wish to be your own executioner. This word you expect from me, this word which can assure your happiness, say it, my dear Dutertre, and our little feast will be as joyous as it ought to be; if not, then do not complain of the bad fate which awaits you. Alas, you will have it so!"

"Charles, if it depends on you," cried Sophie, in a voice of agony, "if this word M. Pascal asks depends on you, then say it, oh, my God, since the salvation of your father and your children depend upon it."

"You hear your wife, my dear Dutertre," resumed Pascal. "Will you be insensible to her voice?"

"Ah, well, then," cried Dutertre, pale and desperate, "since this man is pitiless, you, my father, and you, too, Sophie, can know all. I dismissed Marcelange from my employ. M. Pascal has an interest, of which I am ignorant, in having this man enter the business house of

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Durand, and he asks me to give to this firm a voucher for the integrity of a wretch whom I have thrown out of my establishment as an arrant impostor."

"Ah, monsieur," said the old man, shocked, as he turned to the side where he supposed M. Pascal to be, "that is impossible. You cannot expect such an unworthy action from my son!"

"And if I refuse to do this degrading thing," said Dutertre, "M. Pascal withdraws from me the capital which I have so rashly accepted, he refuses me credit, and in our present crisis that would be our loss, our ruin."

"Great God!" whispered Sophie, terrified.

"That is not all, father," continued Dutertre. "My wife, too, must pay her tribute of shame. M. Pascal is, he says, in love with Mlle. Antonine, and Sophie must serve this love, which she knows to be impossible, and which for honourable reasons she disapproves, or a threat is still suspended over our heads. Now you have the truth, father,—submit to a ruin as terrible as unforeseen, or commit a base action, such is the alternative to which a man whom we have trusted so long as loyal and generous reduces me."

"That again, always that; so goes the world," interposed M. Pascal, sighing and shrugging his shoulders. "So long as they can receive your aid without making any return, oh, then they flatter you and praise you. It is always 'My noble benefactor, my generous saviour;' they call you 'dear, good man,' load you with attentions; they embroider purses for you and make a feast for you. The little children repeat compliments to you, but let the day come when this poor, innocent man presumes in his turn to ask one or two miserable little favours, then they cry, 'Scoundrel!' 'Unworthy!' 'Infamous!'"

"Any sacrifice, compatible with honour, you might have asked of me, M. Pascal," said Dutertre, in a voice which told how deeply he was wounded, "and I would have made it with joy!"

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"Then, what is to be expected?" continued Pascal, without replying to Dutertre, "if the 'good, innocent man,' so good-natured as they suppose him to be, the benefactor, at last, grows weary, ingratitude breaks his heart, for he is naturally sensitive, too sensitive?"

"Ingratitude!" cried Sophie, bursting into tears, "we — we — ingrates, oh, my God!"

"And as the 'good, innocent man' sees a little later that he has been mistaken," continued Pascal, without replying to Sophie, "as he recognises the fact, with pain, that he has been dealing with people incapable of putting their grateful friendship beyond a few puerile prejudices, he says to himself that he would be by far too much of an 'innocent man' to continue to open his purse for the use of such lukewarm friends. So he withdraws his money and his credit as I do, being brought to this resolution by certain circumstances consequent upon the refusal of this dear Dutertre, whom I loved so much, and whom I would love still to call my friend. One last word, sir," added Pascal, addressing the old man. "I have just told you frankly my attitude toward your son, and his toward me; but as it would cost my own heart too much to renounce the faith that I had in the affection of this dear Dutertre, as I know the terrible evils which, through his own fault, must come upon him and his family, I am willing still to give him one quarter of an hour for reconsideration. Let him give me the letter in question, let Madame Dutertre make me the promise that I ask of her, and all shall become again as in the past, and I shall ask for breakfast, and enthusiastically drink a toast to friendship. You are the father of Dutertre; monsieur, you have a great influence over him; judge and decide."

"Charles," said the old man to his son, in a voice full of emotion, "you have acted as an honest man. That is well, but there is still another thing to do; to refuse to vouch for the integrity of a scoundrel is not enough."

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“ Ah, ah ! ” interrupted Pascal, “ what more, then, is there to do ? ”

“ If M. Pascal,” continued the old man, “ persists in this dangerous design, you ought, my son, to write to the house of Durand, that for reasons of which you are ignorant, but which are perhaps hostile to their interests, M. Pascal desires to place this Marcelange with them, and that they must be on their guard, because to be silent when an unworthy project is proposed is to become an accomplice.”

“ I will follow your advice, father,” replied Dutertre, in a firm voice.

“ Better and better,” exclaimed Pascal, sighing, “ to ingratitude they add the odious abuse of confidence. Ah, well, I will drink the cup to the dregs. Only, my poor former friends,” added he, throwing a strange and sinister glance upon the actors in this scene, “ only I fear, you see, that after drinking it a great deal of bitterness and rancour will remain in my heart, and then, you know, when a legitimate hatred succeeds a tender friendship, this hatred, unhappily, becomes a terrible thing.”

“ Oh, Charles ! he frightens me,” whispered the young wife, drawing nearer her husband.

“ As to you, my dear Sophie,” added the old man, with imperturbable calmness, without replying to M. Pascal’s threat, “ you ought not only to favour in nothing — the course which you have taken — a marriage which you must disapprove, but if M. Pascal persists in his intentions, you ought, by all means, to enlighten Mlle. Antonine as to the character of the man who seeks her. To do that, you have only to inform her at what an infamous price he put the continuation of the aid he has rendered your husband.”

“ That is my duty,” replied Sophie, in a calmer voice, “ and I will do it, father.”

“ And you, too, my dear Madame Dutertre, to abuse an honest confidence ! ” said M. Pascal, hiding his anger

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under a veil of sweetness, “to strike me in my dearest hope, ah, this is generous! God grant that I may not give myself up to cruel retaliation! After two years of friendship to part with such sentiments! But it must be, it must be!” added Pascal, looking alternately at Dutertre and his wife. “Is all ended between us?”

Sophie and her husband preserved a silence full of resignation and dignity.

“Oh, well,” said Pascal, taking his hat, “another proof of the ingratitude of men, alas!”

“Monsieur,” cried Dutertre, exasperated beyond measure at the affected sensibility of Pascal, “in the presence of the frightful blow with which you intend to crush us, this continued sarcasm is atrocious. Leave us, leave us!”

“Ah, here I am driven away from this house by people who are conscious of owing their happiness to me for so long a time,—their salvation even, they owe to me,” said Paseal, walking slowly toward the door. “Driven away from here! I! Ah, this mortifying grief disappoints me, indeed!”

Then, pausing, he rummaged his pocket, and drew out the little purse that Sophie had given him a few moments before, and, handing it to the young wife, he said, with a pitiless accent of sardonic contrition:

“Happily, they are mute, or these pearls of steel would tell me every moment how much my name was blessed in this house from which I am driven away.”

Then, with the air of changing his mind, he put the purse back in his pocket, after looking at it with a melancholy smile, and said:

“No, no, I will keep you, poor little innocent purse. You will recall to me the little good I have done, and the cruel deception which has been my reward.”

So saying, M. Pascal put his hand on the knob of the door, opened it, and went out, while Sophie and her husband and her father sat in gloomy silence.

This oppressive silence was still unbroken when M.

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Pascal, returning and opening the door half-way, said across the threshold :

“ To tell the truth, Dutertre, I have reflected. Listen to me, my dear Dutertre.”

A ray of foolish hope illumined the face of Dutertre ; for a moment he believed that, in spite of the cold and sarcastic cruelty that Pascal had first affected, he did feel some pity at last.

Sophie shared the same hope ; like her husband she listened with indescribable anguish to the words of the man who was to dispose so absolutely of their fate, while Pascal said :

“ Next Saturday is your pay-day, is it not, my dear Dutertre ? Let me call you so notwithstanding what has passed between us.”

“ Thank God, he has some pity,” thought Dutertre, and he replied aloud :

“ Yes, monsieur.”

“ I would not wish, you understand, my dear Dutertre,” continued Pascal, “ to put you in ruinous embarrassment. I know Paris, and in the present business crisis you could not get credit for a cent, especially if it were known that I have withdrawn mine from you, and as, after all, you relied upon my name to meet your liabilities, did you not ?”

“ Charles, we are saved !” whispered Sophie, panting, “ he was only testing us.”

Dutertre, struck with this idea, which appeared to him all the more probable as he had at first suspected it, no longer doubted his safety ; his heart beat violently, his contracted features relaxed into their ordinary cheerful expression, and he replied, stammering from excess of emotion :

“ In fact, sir, trusting blindly to your promises, I relied on your credit as usual.”

“ Well, my dear Dutertre, that you may not find yourself in an embarrassed position, I have come back to tell

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you that, as you still have about a week, you had better provide for yourself elsewhere, as you cannot depend on Paris or on me."

And M. Pascal closed the door, and took his departure.

The reaction was so terrible that Dutertre fell back in his chair, pale, inanimate, and utterly exhausted. Hiding his face in his hands, he sobbed :

"Lost, lost!"

"Oh, our children!" cried Sophie, in a heartrending voice, as she threw herself down at her husband's knees, "our poor children!"

"Charles," said the old man, extending his hands, and timidly groping his way to his son, "Charles, my beloved son, have courage!"

"Oh, father, it is ruin, it is bankruptcy," said the unhappy man, with convulsive sobs. "The misery, oh, my God! the misery in store for us all!"

At the height of this overwhelming sorrow came a cruel contrast; the little children, clamorous with joy, rushed into the parlour, exclaiming :

"It is Madeleine; here is Madeleine!"

CHAPTER X.

AT the sight of Madeleine, who was no other than the Marquise de Miranda, the happiness of Madame Dutertre was so great that for a moment all her sorrows and all her terrors for the future were forgotten ; her sweet and gracious countenance beamed with joy, she could only pronounce these words in broken accents :

“ Madeleine, dear Madeleine ! after such a long absence, at last you have come ! ”

After the two young women had embraced each other Sophie said to her friend as she looked at her husband and the old man :

“ Madeleine, my husband and his father,— our father, as he calls me his daughter.”

The marquise, entering suddenly, had thrown herself upon Sophie’s neck with such impetuous affection that Charles Dutertre could not distinguish the features of the stranger, but when, at Madame Dutertre’s last words, the newly arrived friend turned toward him, he felt a sudden strange impression,— an impression so positive that, for a few minutes, he, like his wife, forgot the vindictive speech of M. Pascal.

What Charles Dutertre felt at the sight of Madeleine was a singular mixture of surprise, admiration, and almost distress, for he experienced a sort of indefinable remorse at the thought of being in that critical moment accessible to any emotion except that which pertained to the ruin which threatened him and his family.

The Marquise de Miranda would hardly, at first sight, seem capable of making so sudden and so deep an im-

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pression. Quite tall in stature, her form and waist were completely hidden under a large mantle of spring material which matched that of her dress, whose long, trailing folds scarcely permitted a view of the extremity of her little boot. It was the same with her hands, which were almost entirely concealed by the sleeves of her dress, which she wore, as was her custom, long and floating. A little hood made of erape, as white as snow, formed a framework for her distinctly oval face, and set off the tint of her complexion, for Madeleine had that dull, pale flesh-colour so often found in brunettes of a pronounced type, with large, expressive blue eyes fringed with lashes as black as her eyebrows of jet, while, by a bewitching contrast, her hair, arranged in a mass of little curls, à la Sevigné, was of that charming and delicate ash-blonde which Rubens makes flow like waves upon the shoulders of his fair naiads.

This pallid complexion, these blue eyes, these black eyebrows and blonde hair, gave to Madeleine's physiognomy a very fetching attraction; her ebony lashes were so thick, so closely set, that one might have said — like the women of the East, who by this means impart a passionate and at the same time an enervated expression to their faces — she painted with black the under part of her eyelids, almost always partially closed over their large azure-coloured pupils; her pink nostrils, changing and nervous, dilated on each side of a Greek nose exquisite in its contour; while her lips, of so warm a red that one might almost see the blood circulate under their delicate epidermis, were full but clear cut, and a little prominent, like those of an antique Erigone, and sometimes under their bright coloured edges one could see the beautiful enamel of her teeth.

But why continue this portrait? Will there not be always, however faithful our description, however highly coloured it may be, as immeasurable a distance between that and the reality as exists between a painting and a

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living being? It would be impossible to make perceptible that atmosphere of irresistible attraction, that magnetism, we might say, which emanated from this singular creature. That which in others would have produced a neutralising effect, seemed in her to increase her fascinations a hundredfold. The very length and amplitude of her garments, which, without revealing the contour of her figure, allowed only a sight of the end of her fingers and the extremity of her boot, added a charm to her. In a word, if the chaste drapery which falls at the feet of an antique muse, of severe and thoughtful face, enhances the dignity of her aspect, a veil thrown over the beautiful form of the Venus Aphrodite only serves to excite and inflame the imagination.

Such was the impression which Madeleine had produced on Charles Dutertre, who, speechless and troubled, stood for some moments gazing at her.

Sophie, not suspecting the cause of her husband's silence and emotion, supposed him to be absorbed in thought of the imminent danger which threatened him, and this idea bringing her back to the position she had for a moment forgotten, she said to the marquise, trying to force a smile:

"My dear Madeleine, you must excuse the preoccupation of Charles. At the moment you entered we were talking of business, and business of a very serious nature indeed."

"Yes, really, madame, you must excuse me," said Dutertre, starting, and reproaching himself for the strange impression his wife's friend had made upon him. "Fortunately, all that Sophie has told me of your kindness encourages me to presume upon your indulgence."

"My indulgence? It is I who have need of yours, monsieur," replied the marquise, smiling, "for in my overwhelming desire to see my dear Sophie again, running here unawares, I threw myself on her neck, without dreaming of your presence or that of your father. But

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he will, I know, pardon me for treating Sophie like a sister, since he treats her as a daughter."

With these words, Madeleine turned to the old man.

"Alas! madame," exclaimed he, involuntarily, "never did my poor children have greater need of the fidelity of their friends. Perhaps it is Heaven that sends you—"

"Take care, father," said Dutertre, in a low voice to the old man, as if he would reproach him tenderly for making a stranger acquainted with their domestic troubles, for Madeleine had suddenly directed a surprised and interrogative glance toward Sophie.

The old man comprehended his son's thought, and whispered :

"You are right. I ought to keep silent, but grief is so indiscreet! Come now, Charles, take me back to my room. I feel very much overcome."

And he took his son's arm. As Dutertre was about to leave the parlour the marquise approached him, and said :

"I shall see you soon, M. Dutertre, I warn you, for I am resolved during my sojourn in Paris to come often, oh! very often, to see my dear Sophie. Besides, I wish to make a request of you, and, in order to be certain of your consent, I shall charge Sophie to ask it. You see, I act without ceremony, as a friend, an old friend, for my friendship for you, M. Dutertre, dates from the happiness Sophie owes you. I shall see you, then, soon!" added the marquise, extending her hand to Dutertre with gracious cordiality.

For the first time in his life Sophie's husband felt ashamed of the hands blackened by toil; he hardly dared touch the rosy little fingers of Madeleine; he trembled slightly at the contact; a burning blush mounted to his forehead, and, to dissimulate his mortification and embarrassment, he bowed profoundly before the marquise, and went out with his father.

From the commencement of this scene Sophie's two

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little children, holding each other's hands, and hiding now and then behind their mother, near whom they were standing, opened their eyes wide in silent and curious contemplation of the great lady.

The marquise, perceiving them, exclaimed, as she looked at her friend :

“ Your children ? My God, how pretty they are ! How proud you must be ! ” And she dropped on her knees before them, putting herself, so to speak, on a level with them ; then, dispersing with one hand the blond curls which hid the brow and eyes of the little girl, she lifted the chin of the child's half-bent head with the other hand, looked a moment at the charming little face so rosy and fresh, and kissed the cheeks and eyes and brow and hair and neck of the little one with maternal tenderness.

“ And you, little cherub, you must not be jealous,” added she, and, holding the brown head of the little boy and the blond curls of the little girl together, she divided her caresses between them.

Sophie Dutertre, moved to tears, smiled sadly at this picture, when the marquise, still on her knees, looked up at her and said, holding both children in her embrace :

“ You would not believe, Sophie, that, in embracing these little angels, I comprehend, I feel almost the happiness that you experience when you devour them with kisses and caresses, and it seems to me that I love you even more to know that you are so happy, so perfectly happy.”

As she heard her happiness thus extolled, Sophie, brought back to the painful present a moment forgotten, dropped her head, turned pale, and showed in her countenance such intense agony, that Madeleine rose immediately, and exclaimed :

“ My God, Sophie, how pale you are ! What is the matter ? ”

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Madame Dutertre stifled a sigh, lifted her head sadly, and replied :

“ Nothing is the matter, Madeleine ; the excitement, the joy of seeing you again after such a long separation,—that is all.”

“ Excitement, joy ?” answered the marquise, with an air of painful doubt. “ No, no ! A few moments ago it was excitement and joy, but now you seem to be heart-broken, Sophie.”

Madame Dutertre said nothing, hid her tears, embraced her children, and then whispered to them :

“ Go find your nurse, my darlings.”

Madeleine and Augustus obeyed and left the parlour, not, however, without turning many times to look at the great lady whom they thought so charming.

CHAPTER XI.

SCARCELY were the two children out of the parlour, when Madeleine said to her friend, quickly :

“ Now we are alone, Sophie, I pray you, answer me ; what is the matter with you ? What is the cause of this sudden oppression ? Have absence and distance destroyed your confidence in me ? ”

Sophie had courage enough to overcome her feelings, and hide without falsehood the painful secret which was not hers. Not daring to confess, even to her best friend, the probable and approaching ruin of Dutertre, she said to Madeleine, with apparent calmness :

“ If I must tell you my weakness, my friend, I share sometimes, and doubtless exaggerate, the financial troubles of my husband in this crisis,—temporary they may be, but at the same time very dangerous to our industry,” said Sophie, trying to smile.

“ But this crisis, my dear Sophie, is, as you say, only temporary, is it not ? It is not yet grave and should it become so, what can be done to render it less painful to you and your husband ? Without being very rich I live in perfect ease,—is there anything I would not do ? ”

“ Good, dear, excellent friend ! ” said Sophie, interrupting Madeleine, with emotion, “ always the same heart ! Reassure yourself,—this time of crisis will, I hope, be only a passing evil,—let us talk no more about it, let me have all the joy of seeing you again.”

“ But, Sophie, if these troubles — ”

“ Madeleine,” replied Sophie, sweetly, interrupting her friend again, “ first, let us talk of yourself.”

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“Egoist!”

“That is true, when it touches you; but tell me, you are happy, are you not? because, marquise as you are, you have made a marriage of love, have you not? And what about your husband?”

“I am a widow.”

“Oh, my God, already!”

“I was a widow the evening of my wedding, my dear Sophie.”

“What do you mean?”

“As extraordinary as it may seem, it is nevertheless quite simple. Listen to me: when I left boarding-school and returned to Mexico, where I was ordered, as you know, by my father, I found but one relative of my mother, the Marquis de Miranda, mortally attacked by one of those epidemics which so often ravage Lima. He had no children and had seen me when I was a small child. He knew that my father’s fortune had been entirely destroyed by disastrous lawsuits. He had a paternal sentiment for me, and almost on his death-bed offered me his hand. ‘Accept, my dear Magdeleno, my poor orphan,’ said he to me, ‘my name will give you a social position, my fortune will assure your independence, and I shall die content in knowing that you are happy.’”

“Noble heart!” said Sophie.

“Yes,” replied Madeleine, with emotion, “he was the best of men. My isolated position and earnest entreaties made me accept his generous offer. The priest came to his bedside to consecrate our union, and the ceremony was hardly over when the hand of the Marquis de Miranda was like ice in my own.”

“Madeleine, forgive me,” said Madame Dutertre, involuntarily, “I have made you sad by recalling such painful memories.”

“Painful? no, it is with a sweet melancholy that I think of Marquis de Miranda. It is only ingratitude that is bitter to the heart.”

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“And so young still, does not your liberty incommoder you? Alone, without family, are you accustomed to this life of isolation?”

“I think I am the happiest of women, after you, let it be understood,” replied Madeleine, smiling.

“And do you never think of marrying again, or rather,” added Sophie, smiling in her turn, “of marrying? Because, really, notwithstanding your widowhood, you are a maiden.”

“I hide nothing from you, Sophie. Ah, well, yes. One time I had a desire to marry,—that was a grand passion, a romance,” replied Madeleine, gaily.

“Well, as you are free, who prevented this marriage?”

“Alas! I saw my hero for five minutes only, and from my balcony.”

“Only five minutes?”

“Not more.”

“And you loved him at once?”

“Passionately.”

“And you have never seen him since?”

“Never! No doubt he has been translated to heaven among his brothers, the archangels, whose ideal beauty he possessed.”

“Madeleine, are you speaking seriously?”

“Listen: six months ago I was in Vienna. I lived in the country situated near one of the suburbs of the city. One morning I was in a kiosk, the window of which looked out upon a field. Suddenly my attention was attracted by the noise of stamping and the clash of swords. I ran to my window; it was a duel.”

“Oh, my God!”

“A young man of nineteen or twenty at most, as gracious and beautiful as they paint the angels, was fighting with a sort of giant with a ferocious face. My first wish was that the blond archangel—for blond is my passion—might triumph over the horrible demon, and although the combat lasted in my presence not more than two

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minutes, I had time to admire the intrepidity, the calmness, and dexterity of my hero,— his white breast half naked, his long, blond hair floating to the wind, his brow serene, his eyes brilliant, and a smile upon his lips, he seemed to brave danger with a charming grace, and at that moment, I confess it, his beauty appeared to me more than human. Suddenly, in the midst of a kind of fascination that the flashing of the swords had for me, I saw the giant stagger and fall. Immediately my beautiful hero threw away his sword, clasped his hands, and, falling on his knees before his adversary, lifted to heaven his enchanting face, where shone an expression so touching, so ingenuous, that to see him thus bending in grief over his vanquished enemy, one would have thought of a young girl's grief for her wounded dove, if we can compare this hideous giant to a dove. But his wound did not seem to be mortal, for he sat up, and, in a hoarse voice, which I could hear through my window-blind, said to his young enemy :

“ ‘On my knees, monsieur, I ask your pardon for my disloyal conduct and my rude provocation ; if you had killed me it would have been justice.’

“ Immediately a carriage arrived and carried the wounded man away, and a few minutes afterward all the witnesses of the duel had disappeared. It happened so rapidly that I would have thought I had dreamed it, but for the remembrance of my hero, who has been in my thought always since that day, the ideal of all that is most beautiful, most brave, and most generous.”

“ Now, Madeleine, I conceive that under such circumstances one might, in five minutes, feel a profound impression, perhaps ineffaceable. But have you never seen your hero again ?”

“ Never, I tell you. I do not know his name even ; yet, if I marry, I should marry no man except him.”

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“ Madeleine, you know that our old friendship gives me the privilege of being frank with you.”

“ Could you be otherwise ?”

“ It seems to me that you bear this grand passion very cheerfully.”

“ Why should I be sad ?”

“ But when one loves passionately, nothing is more cruel than absence and separation, and, above all, the fear of never seeing the beloved object again.”

“ That is true ; and notwithstanding the effects of this profound passion, I declare to you they have a very different result with me.”

“ What must I say to you ? When I began to love Charles, I should have died of distress if I had been separated from him.”

“ That is singular. My passion, I repeat to you, manifests itself in an entirely different fashion. There is not a day in which I do not think of my hero, my ideal ; not a day in which I do not recall with love, in the smallest details, the only circumstances under which I saw him ; not a day in which I do not turn all my thought to him ; not a day in which I do not triumph with pride in comparing him to others, for he is the most beautiful of the most beautiful, most generous of the most generous ; in fact, thanks to him, not a day in which I do not lull myself in the most beautiful dreams. Yes, it seems to me that my soul is for ever attached to his by cords as mysterious as they are indissoluble. I do not know if I shall ever behold him again, and yet I feel in my heart only delight and cheerfulness.”

“ I must say, as you do, my dear Madeleine, that it is very singular.”

“ Come, Sophie, let us talk sincerely ; we are alone and, among women, although I am still a young lady to be married or a marriageable girl, we can say the truth. You find my love, do you not, a little platonic ?

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You are astonished to see me so careless or ignorant of the thrill you felt, when for the first time the hand of Charles pressed your hand in love?"

"Come, Madeleine, you are getting silly."

"Be frank, I have guessed your feeling."

"A little, but less than you think."

"That little suffices to penetrate your inmost thought, Madame Materialist."

"I say again, Madeleine, you are growing silly."

"Oh, oh, not so silly!"

Then, after a moment's silence, the marquise resumed, with a smile:

"If you only knew, Sophie, the strange, extraordinary, I might say incomprehensible things that have come in my life! What extravagant adventures have happened to me since our separation! My physician and my friend, the celebrated Doctor Gasterini, a great philosopher as well, has told me a hundred times there is not a creature in the world as singularly endowed as myself."

"Explain your meaning."

"Later, perhaps."

"Why not now?"

"If I had a sorrow to reveal, do you think I would hesitate? But, notwithstanding all that has been extraordinary in my life, or perhaps for that particular reason, I have been the happiest of women. Oh, my God! wait, for this moment I have almost a sorrow for my want of heart and memory."

"A want of memory?"

"Yes, of Antonine; have I not forgotten her since I have been here, talking to you only of myself? Is it wicked? Is it ingratitude enough?"

"I would be at least as culpable as you, but we need not reproach ourselves. This morning she came to bring me your letter and announce your arrival to me. Think of her joy, for she has, you can believe me, the strongest and most tender attachment to you."

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"Poor child, how natural and charming she was! But tell me, has she fulfilled the promise of her childhood? She ought to be as pretty as an angel, with her fifteen years just in flower."

"You are right; she is a rosebud of freshness; add to that the finest, most delicate features that you could ever see. After the death of her nearest relative, she came, as you know, to live with her uncle, President Hubert, who has always been kind to her. Unhappily, he is now seriously ill, and should she lose him she would be compelled to go and live with some distant relatives, and the thought makes her very sad. Besides, you will see her and she will give you her confidence. She has made one to me, in order to ask my advice, for the circumstances are very grave."

"What is this confidence?"

"'If you see Madeleine before I do,' said Antonine to me, 'tell her nothing, my dear Sophie. I wish to confide all to her myself; it is a right which her affection for me gives me. I have other reasons, too, for laying this injunction on you.' So you see, my dear friend, I am obliged, perforce, to be discreet."

"I do not insist upon knowing more. To-day or to-morrow I will go to see this dear child," said the marquise, rising to take leave of Madame Dutertre.

"You leave me so soon, Madeleine?"

"Unfortunately, I must. I have an appointment from three to four, at the house of the Mexican envoy, my compatriot. He is going to conduct me to-morrow to the palace of a foreign Royal Highness. You see, Sophie, I am among the grandes."

"A Highness?"

"Such a Highness that, like all princes who belong to the reigning foreign families, he resides in the Élysée-Bourbon during his sojourn in Paris."

Madame Dutertre could not restrain a movement of surprise, and said, after a minute's reflection:

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“That is singular.”

“What, pray?”

“Antonine lives in a house contiguous to the Élysée. There is nothing very surprising in that, but —”

“But what?”

“I cannot tell you more, Madeleine; when you have heard Antonine’s confidences you will comprehend why I have been struck with this coincidence.”

“What is there in common with Antonine and the Élysée?”

“I tell you again, my dear friend, wait for the confidences of Antonine.”

“So be it, my mysterious friend. Besides, I did not know she lived near the palace. I addressed a letter to her at her old dwelling-house. That suits my plans marvellously; I will go to see her before or after my audience with the prince.”

“Come, what a great lady you are!”

“Pity me, rather, my dear Sophie, because it is a question of entreaty, not for myself, I am not in the habit of begging, but it concerns an important service to be done for a proscribed family, and one worthy of the highest interest. The mission is very difficult, very delicate; however, I consented to undertake it at the time of my departure from Venice, and I desire to try everything which can further my success.”

“And surely you will succeed. Can any one refuse you anything? Do you remember when we were at school, as soon as a petition was to be addressed to our mistress you were always chosen as ambassadress; and they were right, for, really, you seem to possess a talisman for obtaining all you want.”

“I assure you, my good Sophie,” replied Madeleine, smiling in spite of herself, “I assure you I am often a magician without trying to be one. My God!” added the marquise, laughing, “how many fine extravagances I have to tell you. But we will see, some other

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time. Come, dear Sophie, good-bye,—will see you soon.”

“Oh, yes, come again soon, I implore you !”

“My God ! you can count on my coming almost every day, because I am a bird of passage, and I have decided to employ my time in Paris well, that is to say, I shall see you very often.”

“What ! you are not thinking of leaving Paris soon ?”

“I do not know ; that will depend upon the inspiration that my hero, my passion, my ideal will give me, for I decide on nothing without consulting him in thought. But, as he always inspires me admirably, I doubt not he will induce me to stay near you as long a time as possible.”

“Ah, my God, Madeleine ; but, now I think of it, you told my husband that you had a favour to ask of him.”

“That is true, I forgot it. It is a very simple thing. I understand nothing of money affairs. I learned that recently, to my cost, in Germany. I had a letter of credit on a certain Aloysius Schmidt, of Vienna ; he cheated me shamefully, so I promised myself to be on my guard in the future. So I have taken another letter of credit on Paris. I wish to ask your husband to demand money for me when I have need of it. He will watch over my interests, and, thanks to him, I shall not be exposed to the possibility of falling into the clutches of a new Aloysius Schmidt.”

“Nothing easier, my dear Madeleine. Charles will endorse your letter of credit and verify at hand all your accounts.”

“That will be all the more necessary, since, between us, I am told that the person on whom they have given me this letter of credit is enormously rich, and as solvent as one could be, but crafty and sordid to the last degree.”

“You do well to inform me beforehand. Charles will redouble his watchfulness.”

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"Besides, your husband, who is in business, ought to know the man of whom I speak,—they say he is one of the greatest capitalists in France."

"What is his name?"

"M. Pascal."

"M. Pascal?" repeated Madame Dutertre.

And she could not help trembling and turning pale.

The marquise, seeing her friend's emotion, said, quickly :

"Sophie, pray, what is the matter?"

"Nothing, nothing, I assure you."

"I see that something is the matter; answer me, I implore you."

"Ah, well, if I must tell you, my husband has had some business relations with M. Pascal. Unhappily, a great misunderstanding was the result, and —"

"Why, Sophie, you are very unreasonable to give yourself so much concern, because, in consequence of this misunderstanding with M. Pascal, your husband cannot render me the good office I expected from him."

Madame Dutertre, willing to leave her friend in this error, tried to regain her calmness, and said to her:

"Indeed, it disappoints me very much to think that Charles will not be able to do you the first service that you ask of us."

"Stop, Sophie, you will make me regret having appealed so cordially to you."

"Madeleine —"

"Really, it is not such a great pity! And, besides, to prevent my being deceived, I will address myself directly to this M. Pascal, but I will demand my accounts every week. Your husband can examine them, and, if they are not correct, I will know perfectly well how to complain of them to monsieur, my banker, and to take another."

"You are right, Madeleine," said Sophie, recovering by degrees her self-possession, "and the supervision of

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my husband will, in fact, be more necessary than you think."

"So this M. Pascal is a sordid fellow?"

"Madeleine," said Madame Dutertre, unable longer to conquer her emotion, "I beseech you, and let me speak to you as a friend, as a sister, whatever may be the reason, whatever may be the pretext, place no dependence in M. Pascal!"

"What do you mean, Sophie?"

"In a word, if he offers you his services, refuse them."

"His services? But I have no service to ask of him. I have a letter of credit on him. I will go and draw money from his bank when I have need of it—that is all."

"That may be, but you might, through mistake or ignorance of business, exceed your credit, and then—"

"Well, what then?"

"I know from a person who has told Charles and myself that, once M. Pascal has you in his debt, he will abuse his power cruelly, oh, so cruelly."

"Come, my good Sophie, I see that you take me for a giddy prodigal. Reassure yourself, and admire my economy. I have so much order that I lay by every year something from my income, and although these savings are small I place them at your disposal."

"Dear, tender friend, I thank you a thousand times! I repeat, the crisis which gives my husband and myself so much concern will soon end; but let me tell you again, do not trust M. Pascal. When you have seen Antonine, I will tell you more."

"Antonine again! You just spoke of her in connection with the Élysée."

"Yes, it all hangs together; you will see it yourself after to-morrow. I will explain myself entirely, which will be important to Antonine."

"After to-morrow, then, my dear Sophie. I must confess you excite my curiosity very much, and I try

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in vain to discover what there can be in common between Antonine and the Élysée, or between Antonine and that wicked man, for so at least he appears who is named M. Pascal."

Half-past three sounded from the factory clock.

"My God! how late I am!" said Madeleine to her friend. "I shall barely have time, but I must embrace your angelic children before I go."

The two women left the parlour.

We will return with the reader to the Élysée-Bourbon, where we left the archduke alone, after the departure of M. Pascal.

CHAPTER XII.

THE archduke, anxious and preoccupied, was walking back and forth in his study, while his secretary of ordinance unsealed and examined the letters received during the day.

“This despatch, monseigneur,” pursued the secretary, “relates to Colonel Pernetti, exiled with his family to England. We think it necessary to put your Highness on guard against the proceedings and petitions of the friends of Colonel Pernetti.”

“I do not need that warning. The republican principles of this man are too dangerous for me to listen, under any consideration, to what may be urged in his favour. Go on.”

“His Eminence, the envoy plenipotentiary from the Mexican Republic, asks the favour of presenting one of his compatriots to your Highness. It concerns a very urgent interest, and he requests your Highness to have the kindness to grant an audience to-morrow.”

“Is the list of audiences complete for to-morrow?”

“No, monseigneur.”

“Write that at two o’clock, to-morrow, I will receive the envoy from Mexico, and his compatriot?”

The secretary wrote.

A moment passed, and the archduke said to him :

“Does he mention in this letter the name of the person whom he wishes to present?”

“No, monseigneur.”

“That is contrary to all custom; I shall not grant the audience.”

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The secretary put the letter he had begun to write aside, and took another sheet of paper.

In the meanwhile the prince changed his mind after reflection, and said :

“I will grant the audience.”

The secretary bowed his head in assent, and, taking another letter, he rose and presented it to the prince without breaking the seal, and said :

“On this envelope is written ‘Confidential and Special,’ monseigneur.”

The archduke took the letter and read it. It was from M. Pascal, and was expressed in these familiar words :

“After mature reflection, monseigneur, instead of waiting upon you Thursday I will see you to-morrow at three o’clock ; it will depend upon you absolutely whether our business is concluded and signed during that interview.

Your devoted

“PASCAL.”

One moment of lively hope, soon tempered by the recollection of the eccentricities of M. Pascal’s character, thrilled the prince, who, however, said, coldly :

“Write M. Pascal on the list of audiences for to-morrow at three o’clock.”

An aide-de-camp was then presented, who asked if the prince could receive Count Frantz de Neuberg.

“Certainly,” said the archduke.

After a few more moments’ work with his secretary of ordinance, he gave the order to introduce Frantz.

Frantz presented himself, blushing, before the prince, his godfather, for the young count was excessively timid, and unsophisticated to a degree that would make our experienced lads of twenty laugh. Brought up by a Protestant pastor in the depth of a German village belonging to one of the numerous possessions of the arch-

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duke, the godson of the Royal Highness had left this austere solitude, only to enter at sixteen years a military school devoted to the nobility, and kept with puritanical strictness. From that school, he went, by order of the prince, to serve in the Russian army as a volunteer in the wars of the Caucasus. The rude discipline of the camp ; the severity of manners which characterised the old general to whom he had been sent and especially recommended by his royal godfather ; the chain of sad and serious thought peculiar to brave but tender and melancholy souls ; the sight of the fields of battle during a bitter war which knew no mercy nor pity ; the habitual gravity of mind imparted to these same souls by the possibility if not the expectation of death, coolly braved every day in the midst of the most frightful perils ; the mystery of his birth, to which was joined the pain of never having known the caresses of a father or a mother, — all had conspired to accentuate the natural reserve and timidity of his character, and increase the ingenuousness of his sincere and loving heart. In Frantz, as in many others, heroic courage was united with extreme and unconquerable timidity in the ordinary relations of life.

Besides, whether from prudence, or other reason, the prince, during the six months passed in Germany after the young man had returned from the war, had kept his godson far from the court. This determination agreed marvellously with the simple and studious habits of Frantz, who found the highest happiness in an obscure and tranquil life. As to the sentiments he felt for the prince, his godfather, he was full of gratitude, loyalty, and respectful affection, the expression of which was greatly restrained by the imposing prestige of his royal protector's rank.

The embarrassment of Frantz was so painful, when, after the departure of the secretary, he stood in the presence of his godfather, that for some time he remained silent, his eyes cast down.

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Fortunately, at the sight of the young man, the prince appeared to forget his laborious duties; his cold and haughty face relaxed, his brow grew clearer, a smile parted his lips, and he said, affectionately, to Frantz:

“Good morning, my child.”

And taking the young man’s blond head in his two hands, he kissed him tenderly on the forehead; then he added, as if he felt the need of opening his heart:

“I am glad to see you, Frantz. I have been overwhelmed with business, sad business, this morning. Here, give me your arm and let us take a turn together in the garden.”

Frantz opened one of the glass doors which led to the steps opposite the lawn, and the godfather and godson, arm in arm, took their way to the shady walk in which the young man had promenaded so long that morning.

“Now, what is the matter, my child?” said the prince, observing at once the embarrassment of the young man.

“Monseigneur,” replied Frantz, with increasing bashfulness, “I have a confidence to make to your Royal Highness.”

“A confidence!” repeated the prince, smiling. “Let us hear, then, the confidence of Count Frantz.”

“It is a very important confidence, monseigneur.”

“Well, what is this important confidence?”

“Monseigneur, I have no parents. Your Royal Highness has, up to this time, deigned to stand for me in the place of family.”

“And you have bravely repaid my care, and fulfilled my hopes, my dear Frantz; you have even surpassed them. Modest, studious, and courageous, although a lad, three years ago, you fought with such intelligence and intrepidity in that terrible war to which I sent you for your first experience. You have received there your first wound, your baptism of fire. I will not speak of a duel, which I ought to ignore, but in which you have,

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I know, given proof of as much bravery as generosity."

"Monseigneur—"

"I pray you, let me in this moment recall all your claims to my tenderness. It does me good, it makes me forget the bitter vexations of which you are the innocent and involuntary cause."

"I, monseigneur?"

"You, because, if you continue to fill me with satisfaction, you cannot foresee the future which my loving ambition prepares for you,—the un hoped-for position which perhaps awaits you."

"You know, monseigneur, the simplicity of my tastes, and—"

"My dear Frantz," interrupted the prince, "this simplicity, this modesty, are virtues under certain conditions, while under other circumstances these virtues become weakness and indolence. But we are getting far away from the confidence. Come, what is it you have to tell me?"

"Monseigneur—"

"Well, speak; are you afraid of me? Is there a single thought in your heart which you cannot confess with a bold face and steady eye?"

"No, monseigneur; so, without any evasion, I will tell your Highness that I wish to get married."

If a thunderbolt had fallen at the feet of the prince he could not have been more astounded than he was at the words of Frantz; he rudely withdrew his arm from that of the young man, stepped back, and exclaimed:

"You marry, Frantz?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"Why, you are a fool."

"Monseigneur!"

"You marry, and hardly twenty years old! You marry! When I was planning for you to—"

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Then the prince, regaining his self-possession, said, calmly and coldly :

“ And whom do you wish to marry, Frantz ? ”

“ Mlle. Antonine Hubert, monseigneur.”

“ Who is this Mlle. Hubert ? What did you say her name was ? ”

“ Hubert, monseigneur.”

“ And what is Mlle. Hubert ? ”

“ The niece of a French magistrate, monseigneur, President Hubert.”

“ And where have you made the acquaintance of this young lady ? ”

“ Here, monseigneur.”

“ Here ? I have never received any person of that name.”

“ When I say here, monseigneur, I mean to say in this walk where we are.”

“ Speak more clearly.”

“ Your Royal Highness sees this wall of protection which separates the neighbouring garden ? ”

“ Yes, go on.”

“ I was promenading in this walk when I saw Mlle. Antonine for the first time.”

“ In this garden ? ” replied the prince, advancing to the wall, and taking a view of it. Then he added :

“ This young lady, then, lives in the next house ? ”

“ Yes, monseigneur ; her uncle occupies a part of the ground floor.”

“ Very well.”

After a few minutes’ reflection, the prince added, severely :

“ You have given me your confidence, Frantz. I accept it ; but act with perfect candour, with the most thorough sincerity, if you do not — ”

“ Monseigneur ! ” interrupted Frantz, in painful surprise.

“ Well, well, I was wrong to suspect your truthfulness,

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Frantz. You have never lied to me in your life. Speak, I will listen to you."

"Your Royal Highness knows that, since our arrival in Paris, I have rarely gone out in the evening."

"That is true; I am aware of your disinclination to society, and, too, of your excessive timidity, which increases your distaste for appearing at these dreaded French functions, where you are naturally a stranger. I have not insisted upon it, Frantz, and have allowed you to dispose of most of your evenings as you pleased."

"In one of these evenings, monseigneur, six weeks ago, I saw Mlle. Antonine for the first time. She was watering flowers; I was leaning on my elbow there at the wall. She saw me; I saluted her. She returned my salutation, blushed, and continued to water her flowers; twice she looked up at me, and we bowed to each other again; then, as it grew dark entirely, Mlle. Antonine left the garden."

It is impossible to reproduce the ingenuous grace with which poor Frantz made this artless recital of his first interview with the young girl. The emotion betrayed by his voice, the heightened colour of his face, all proved the honesty of this pure and innocent soul.

"One question, Frantz," said the prince. "Has this young lady a mother?"

"No, monseigneur, Mlle. Antonine lost her mother when she was in the cradle, and her father died some years ago."

"Is her uncle, President Hubert, married?"

"No, monseigneur."

"How old is she?"

"Fifteen years and a half, monseigneur."

"And is she pretty?"

"Antonine! monseigneur!"

In this exclamation of Frantz, there was almost a reproach, as if it were possible for him not to recognise the beauty of Mlle. Antonine.

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"I ask you, Frantz," repeated the archduke, "if this young girl is pretty?"

"Monseigneur, do you recollect the sleeping Hebe in the gallery of your palace of Offenbach?"

"One of my finest Correggios."

"Monseigneur, Mlle. Antonine resembles this painting by Correggio, although she is far more beautiful."

"It would be difficult to be that."

"Monseigneur knows that I always speak the truth," replied Frantz, ingenuously.

"Well, go on with your story."

"I cannot tell you, monseigneur, what I felt when returning to my chamber. I thought of Mlle. Antonine. I was agitated, troubled, and happy at the same time. I did not sleep all night. The moon rose; I opened my window, and remained on my balcony until day, looking at the tops of the trees in Mlle. Antonine's garden. Oh, monseigneur, how long the hours of the next day seemed to me! Before sunset, I was there again at the wall. At last mademoiselle came again to water her flowers. Every moment, thinking she had already seen me, I prepared to salute her, but I do not know how it happened, she did not see me. She came, however, to water flowers close to the wall where I was standing. I wanted to cough lightly to attract her attention, but I dared not. Night came on, my heart was broken, monseigneur, for still mademoiselle had not seen me. Finally, she returned to the house, after setting her little watering-pot near the fountain. Fortunately, thinking, no doubt, that it was out of place there, she returned, and set it on a bench near the wall. Then by chance, turning her eyes toward me, she discovered me at last. We saluted each other at the same time, monseigneur, and she went back into the house quickly. I then gathered some beautiful roses, and, trying to be very dexterous, although my heart was beating violently, I had the good luck to let the bouquet fall in the mouth

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of the watering-pot that mademoiselle had left there. When I returned to my room, I trembled to think what would be the thought of the young lady when she found these flowers. I was so uneasy, that I had a great mind to descend again and jump over the little wall and take the bouquet away. I do know what restrained me. Perhaps I hoped that Mlle. Antonine would not take offence at it. What a night I passed, monseigneur! The next day I ran to the wall; the watering-pot and the bouquet were there on the bench, but I waited in vain for Mlle. Antonine. She did not come that evening or the next day to look after her flowers. I cannot describe to you, monseigneur, the sadness and the anguish I endured those three days and nights, and you would have discovered my grief if you had not taken your departure just at that time."

"For the journey to Fontainebleau, you mean?"

"Yes, monseigneur. But, pardon me; perhaps I am abusing the patience of your Royal Highness?"

"No, no, Frantz, continue; on the contrary, I insist upon knowing all. I pray you, continue your story with the same sincerity."

CHAPTER XIII.

AT the invitation of the archduke, Frantz de Neuberg continued his recital with charming frankness :

“ For three days Mlle. Antonine did not appear, monseigneur. Overwhelmed with sadness, and hoping nothing, I went, nevertheless, at the accustomed hour to the garden. What was my surprise, my joy, monseigneur, when, arriving near the wall, I saw just below me Mlle. Antonine, seated on the bench ! She held in her hand, lying on her lap, my bouquet of roses, faded a long time ; her head was bent over ; I could only see her neck and the edge of her hair ; she did not suspect I was there ; I remained motionless, hardly daring to breathe, for fear I might drive her away by revealing my presence. Finally I grew bolder, and I said, trembling, for it was the first time I had spoken to her, ‘ Good evening, mademoiselle.’ She trembled so that the faded bouquet fell out of her lap. She did not notice it, and, without changing her attitude or lifting her head, she replied, in a low voice, as agitated as my own, ‘ Good evening, monsieur.’ Seeing I was so well received, I added : ‘ You have not come to water your flowers for three days, mademoiselle.’ ‘ That is true, monsieur,’ answered she, in a broken voice, ‘ I have been a little sick.’ ‘ Oh, my God ! ’ I exclaimed, with such evident distress that mademoiselle raised her head a moment and looked at me. I saw, alas ! that she was, monseigneur, really very pale, but she soon resumed her first attitude, and again I saw only her neck, which seemed to me to be slightly blushing : ‘ And now, mademoiselle,

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you are better ?' 'Yes, monsieur,' said she. Then, after a short silence, I added : ' You will then be able to water your flowers every evening as you have done in the past.' 'I do not know, monsieur, I hope so.' 'And do you not feel afraid the fresh evening air will be injurious to you, after having been sick, mademoiselle ?' 'You are right, monsieur,' replied she, 'I thank you, I am going back into the house.' And really, monseigneur, it had rained all the morning and it was growing very cold. The moment she left the bench I said to her : ' Mademoiselle, will you give me this faded bouquet which has fallen at your feet?' She picked it up and handed it to me in silence, without lifting her head or looking at me. I took it as a treasure, monseigneur, and soon Mlle. Antonine disappeared in a turn of the garden walk."

The prince listened to his godson with profound attention. The frankness of this recital proved its sincerity. Until then, his only thought was that Frantz had been the sport of one of those Parisian coquettes, so dangerous to strangers, or the dupe of an adventurous and designing girl ; but now a graver fear assailed him : a love like this, so chaste and pure, would, for reason of its purity, which banished all remorse from the minds of these two children,—one fifteen and a half and the other twenty,—become profoundly rooted in their hearts.

Frantz, seeing the countenance of the prince grow more and more gloomy, and meeting his glance, which had regained its usual haughty coldness, stopped, utterly confounded.

"So," said the archduke, sarcastically, when his godson discontinued his story, "you wish to marry a young girl to whom you have addressed three or four words, and whose rare beauty, as you say, has turned your head."

"I hope to obtain the consent of your Royal Highness to marry Mlle. Antonine, because I love her, mon-

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seigneur, and it is impossible for our marriage to be postponed."

At these words, so resolutely uttered in spite of the timidity of Frantz, the prince trembled and reproached himself for having believed it to be one of those chaste loves of such proverbial purity.

"And why, sir," said the prince, in a threatening voice, "why cannot this marriage be postponed?"

"Because I am a man of honour, monseigneur."

"A man of honour! You are either a dishonest man, sir, or a dupe."

"Monseigneur!"

"You have basely abused the innocence of a child of fifteen years, I tell you, or you are her dupe. Parisian girls are precocious in the art of cheating husbands."

Frantz looked at the prince a moment in silence, but without anger or confusion, vainly trying to ascertain the meaning of these words which touched him neither in his love nor in his honour.

"Excuse me, monseigneur, I do not understand you."

Frantz uttered these words with such an expression of sincerity, with such ingenuous assurance, that the prince, more and more astonished, added, after a moment's silence, looking at the young man with a penetrating gaze :

"Did you not just tell me that your marriage with this young lady could not be deferred?"

"No, monseigneur; with the permission of your Royal Highness, it ought not to be and will not be!"

"Because without marriage you would be wanting in honour?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"And in what and why would you be wanting in honour, if you did not marry Mlle. Antonine?"

"Because we have sworn before Heaven to belong to each other, monseigneur," replied Frantz, with restrained energy.

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The prince, half reassured, added, however :

“ And pray, under what circumstances have you exchanged this oath ? ”

“ Fearing to displease you, monseigneur, or fatigue your attention, I discontinued my story.”

“ Well, continue it.”

“ Monseigneur, I fear — ”

“ Continue,— omit nothing. I wish to know all of this affair.”

“ The uncle of mademoiselle went out in the evening, monseigneur, and she remained at home alone. The season was so beautiful that Mlle. Antonine spent all her evenings in the garden. We grew better acquainted with each other ; we talked long together many times, — she, on the little bench, I, leaning on my elbow on the wall ; she told me all about her life ; I told her about mine, and, above all, monseigneur, my respectful affection for you, to whom I owe so much. Mlle. Antonine shares this moment my profound gratitude to your Royal Highness.”

At this point of the conversation, the sound of a gradually approaching step attracted the attention of the prince. He turned and saw one of his aids, who advanced, but stopped respectfully at a little distance. At a sign from the archduke, the officer came forward.

“ What is it, sir ? ” asked the prince.

“ His Excellency, the minister of war, has just arrived ; he is at the order of your Royal Highness for the visit which is to be made to the Hôtel des Invalides.”

“ Say to his Excellency that I will be with him in a moment.”

As the aide-de-camp departed, the prince turned coldly to Frantz, and said :

“ Return to your apartments, monsieur ; you are under arrest until the moment of your departure.”

“ My departure, monseigneur ? ”

“ Yes.”

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"My departure?" repeated Frantz, amazed. "Oh, my God! And where are you going to send me, monseigneur?"

"You will see. I shall confide you to the care of Major Butler; he will answer for you to me. Before twenty-four hours you shall leave Paris."

"Mercy, monseigneur!" cried Frantz, in a supplicating voice, not able to believe what he had heard. "Have pity on me, and do not compel me to depart."

"Return to your apartments," said the prince, with the severity of a military command, making a sign for Frantz to pass before him. "I never revoke an order once given. Obey!"

Frantz, overwhelmed, returned in sadness to his chamber, situated on the first floor of the palace, not far from the apartment of the archduke, and looking out upon the garden. At seven o'clock a dinner was served the young prisoner, which he did not touch. Night came, and Frantz, to his great astonishment, and to his deep and painful humiliation, heard his outside doors fastened with a double lock. Toward midnight, when the whole palace was asleep, he opened his window softly, went out on the balcony, and leaning outside, succeeded, with the aid of his cane, in removing a little of the wall plastered on one of the posts of a window-blind on the ground floor. It was on this tottering support that Frantz, with as much dexterity as temerity, having straddled the balcony railing, set the point of his foot; then, aiding himself by the rounds of the blind as a ladder, he reached the ground, ran into the shady walk, jumped the little wall, and soon found himself in the garden of the house occupied by Antonine.

Although the moon was veiled by thick clouds, a dim light shone under the great trees which had served as a place of meeting for Antonine and Frantz; at the end of a few moments, he perceived at a distance a figure in white, rapidly approaching; the young girl soon ap-

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proached him and said, in a voice which betrayed her excitement :

“ I came only for one minute, that you might not be disappointed, Frantz. I have taken advantage of my uncle’s sleep ; he is very sick, and I cannot stay away from him a longer time. Good-bye, Frantz,” added Antonine, with a deep sigh ; “ it is very sad to part so soon, but it must be. Good-bye, again,— perhaps I can see you to-morrow.”

The young man was so crushed by the news he had to communicate to the young girl that he had not the strength to interrupt her. Then, in a voice broken by sobs, he exclaimed :

“ Antonine, we are lost ! ”

“ Lost ! ”

“ I am going away.”

“ You ! ”

“ The prince compels me to go.”

“ Oh, my God ! ” murmured Antonine, turning pale and leaning for support on the back of the rustic bench. “ Oh, my God ! ”

And, unable to utter another word, she burst into tears. After a heartrending silence, she said :

“ And you hoped for the consent of the prince, Frantz.”

“ Alas ! I hoped to obtain it by simply telling him how much I loved you, and how much you deserved that love. The prince is inflexible.”

“ To go away,—to be separated from each other, Frantz,” murmured Antonine, in a broken voice ; “ but it is not possible,— it would kill us both with sorrow, and the prince would not do that.”

“ His will is inflexible ; but whatever may happen,” cried Frantz, falling at the young girl’s knees, “ yes, although I am a foreigner here, without family, without knowing what may be the consequence, I will stay in spite of the prince. Have courage, Antonine — ”

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Frantz could not continue; he saw a light shining in the distance, and a voice in great pain called:

"Mlle. Antonine!"

"My God! that is my uncle's nurse,—she is looking for me!" cried the young girl; then, turning to Frantz, she said, "Frantz, if you go away, I shall die."

And Antonine disappeared in the direction of the light.

The young man, overcome by grief, fell on the bench, hiding his face in his hands. Presently he heard a voice, coming down the walk in the garden of the Élysée, calling him by name:

"Frantz!"

He started, thinking it was the voice of the prince; he was not mistaken. A second time his name was called.

Fear, the habit of passive obedience, and his respect for the archduke, as well as his gratitude, led Frantz back to the little wall which separated the two gardens; behind this wall he saw the prince standing in the light of the moon. The prince extended his hand with haughty reserve, and assisted him to regain the walk.

"Immediately upon my return, I entered your apartment," said the archduke, severely. "I did not find you. Your open window told me all. Now, follow me."

"Monseigneur," cried Frantz, throwing himself at the feet of the prince, and clasping his hands, "monseigneur, listen to me."

"Major Butler," said the prince, in a loud voice, addressing a person who until then had been hidden by the shade, "accompany Count Frantz to his apartment, and do not leave him a moment. I hold you responsible for him."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE day after these events had transpired the archduke, dressed always in his uniform, for he carried military etiquette to its most extreme limit, was in his study about two o'clock in the afternoon. One of his aids, a man about forty years old, of calm and resolute countenance, was standing before the table on the side opposite the prince, who was seated, writing, with a haughtier, severer, and more care-worn manner than usual. As he wrote, without raising his eyes to the officer, he said to him :

“ Is Captain Blum with Count Frantz ? ”

“ Yes, monseigneur.”

“ You have just seen the physician.”

“ Yes, monseigneur.”

“ What does he think of the count’s condition ? ”

“ He finds it more satisfactory, monseigneur.”

“ Does he think Count Frantz can support the fatigues of the journey without danger ? ”

“ Yes, monseigneur.”

“ Major Butler, go and give the order at once to prepare one of my travelling carriages.”

“ Yes, monseigneur.”

“ This evening at six o’clock you will depart with Count Frantz. Here is the guide for your route,” added the prince, handing to his aid the note he had just written.

Then he remarked :

“ Major Butler, you will not wait long for the proofs

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of my satisfaction if you accomplish, with your usual devotion and firmness, the mission I entrust to you."

"Your Highness can rely upon me."

"I know it, but I also know that, once recovering from his present dejection, and being no longer restrained by his respect for me, Count Frantz will certainly try to escape from your care along the route, and to get back to Paris at any risk. If this misfortune happens, sir, take care, for all my resentment will fall on you."

"I am certain that I shall not be undeserving of the kindness of your Highness."

"I hope so. Do not forget, too, to write to me twice a day until you reach the frontier."

"I will not fail, monseigneur."

"Upon your arrival on the territory of the Rhine provinces, send a despatch to the military authority."

"Yes, monseigneur."

"The end of your journey reached, you will inform me, and you will receive new orders from me."

At this moment the princee, hearing a light knock at the door, said to the major :

"See who that is."

Another aide-de-camp handed the officer a letter, and said, in a low voice :

"The envoy from Mexico has just sent this letter for his Highness."

And the aide-de-camp went out.

The major presented the letter to the prince, informing him whence it came.

"I recommend to you once more the strictest vigilance, Major Butler," said the archduke, putting aside the letter from the Mexican envoy without opening it. "You will answer to me in conducting Count Frantz to the frontier."

"I give you my word, monseigneur."

"Go, major, I accept your word, I know its value. If you keep it, you will have only cause for congratulation.

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So, make your preparation to leave at six o'clock promptly. Diesbach will provide you with the money necessary for your journey."

The major bowed respectfully.

"Say to Colonel Heidelberg that, after a few minutes, he can introduce the envoy of Mexico and the person who accompanies him."

"Yes, monseigneur."

The officer bowed profoundly, and went out.

The prince, left alone, said to himself as he slowly unsealed the letter which had been delivered to him :

"I must save this unhappy young man from his own folly. Such a marriage! It is insanity. Well, I must be mad myself to feel so disturbed about the consequences of this foolish passion of Frantz, as if I had not complete power over him. It is not anger, it is pity which his conduct ought to inspire in me."

In the midst of these reflections the prince had broken the seal of the letter and glanced perfunctorily over its contents. Suddenly he jumped up from his arm-chair ; his haughty features took on an expression of righteous indignation, as he said :

"The Marquise de Miranda, that infernal woman who recently created such a scandal in Bologna,—almost a revolution,—by exposing that unfortunate cardinal to the hisses and the fury of an entire populace already so much disaffected! Oh, on no pretext will I receive that shameless creature."

And the prince sprang to the door to give the order not to admit the marquise.

He was too late.

The folding doors opened at that very moment, and she entered, accompanied by the envoy of Mexico.

Taking advantage of the surprise of the archduke, the cause of which he did not understand, the diplomatist bowed profoundly, and said :

"Monseigneur, I dare hope that your Highness will

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accept the excuses I have just had the honour of offering you by letter on the subject of my omission yesterday of an important formality. I ought to have mentioned the name of the person for whom I solicited the favour of an audience from your Highness. I have repaired this omission, and now it only remains for me to have the honour of presenting to your Highness the Marquise de Miranda, who bears a distinguished name in our country, and to commend her to the kindness of your Highness."

The diplomatist, taking the prolonged silence of the prince for a dismissal, bowed respectfully, and went out, not a little disappointed at so cold a reception.

Madeleine and the archduke were left alone.

The marquise was, according to her custom, as simply and amply dressed as on the day before; only, by chance or intention, a little veil of English point adorned her hood of white crape, and almost entirely hid her face.

The prince, whose manners partook at the same time of military harshness and religious austerity,—his love for the mother of Frantz having been his first and only youthful error,—looked with a sort of aversion upon this woman, who, in his eyes, symbolised the most profound and most dangerous perversity, for popular rumour accused the marquise of attacking, by preference, with her seductions, persons of the most imposing and sacred character; and then, finally, the widely known adventure with the cardinal legate had, as the archduke believed, been followed by such deplorable consequences that a sentiment of political revenge was added to his hatred of Madeleine. So, notwithstanding his cold and polished dignity, he thought at first of dismissing his importunate visitor unceremoniously, or of disdainfully retiring into another chamber without uttering a word. But finally, the curiosity to see this woman about whom so many strange rumours were in circulation, and, above

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all, a keen desire to treat her with that contempt which in his opinion she deserved; modified his resolution. He remained; but instead of offering a seat to Madeleine, who studied his face attentively through her veil, he leaned his back squarely against the chimney, crossed his arms, and, with his head thrown back, his eyebrows imperiously elevated, he measured her with all the haughtiness of his sovereign pride, shut himself up in a chilling silence, and said to her not one word of encouragement or common civility.

The marquise, accustomed to produce a very different impression, and feeling, unconsciously perhaps, a kind of intimidation which many persons feel in the presence of high rank, particularly when it is identified with such insolent arrogance, was abashed by such a crushing reception, when she had hoped so much from the courtesy of the prince.

However, as she was acting for interests she believed to be sacred, and as she was brave, she conquered her emotion, and, as the Spanish proverb naturalised in Mexico says, she resolved bravely to "take the bull by the horns." So, seating herself carelessly in an arm-chair, she said to the prince, with the easiest and most smiling manner in the world :

"I come, monseigneur, simply to ask two things of you, one almost impossible and the other altogether impossible."

The archduke was confounded; his sovereign rank, his dignity, the severity of his character, his inflexible code of etiquette, always so powerful in the courts of the North, had accustomed him to see women, even, approach him with the most humble respect. Judge, then, of his dismay when Madeleine continued gaily, with familiar ease:

" You do not reply, monseigneur ? How shall I interpret the silence of your Highness ? Is it reflection ? Is it timidity, or is it consent ? Can it be

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impoliteness? Impoliteness? No, I cannot believe that. In touching the soil of France, slaves become free, and men with the least gallantry at once assume an exquisite courtesy."

The prince, almost crazed by the amazement and anger produced by these audacious words, remained silent.

The marquise continued, smiling:

"Nothing? Not a word? Come, monseigneur, what is the real significance of the continued speechlessness of your Highness? Again I ask, is it reflection? Then reflect. Is it timidity? Then overcome it. Is it impoliteness? Remember that we are in France, and that I am a woman. But can I, on the contrary, regard your silence as a blind consent to what I am going to ask of you? Then say so at once, that I may at least inform you what are the favours that you grant me so graciously beforehand, and for which I desire to thank you cordially."

Then Madeleine, taking off her gloves, extended her hand to the archduke. That perfect little hand, white, delicate, tapering, fluttering, veined with azure, whose finger-nails resembled rose-coloured shells, attracted the attention of the prince; in all his life he had never seen such a hand. But soon, ashamed, revolting at the thought of yielding to such a triviality at such an important moment, the blush of indignation mounted to his brow, and he sought some word superlatively scornful and wounding, that he might crush, with a single club-like blow, this presumptuous woman, whose insolence had already lasted too long for the dignity of an archduke.

Unfortunately, the prince was more accustomed to command his troops, or to receive the homage of courtiers, than to find crushing words on the spur of the moment, especially when they were wanted to crush a young and pretty woman; nevertheless, he persisted in seeking.

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This serene cogitation gave Madeleine the time to hide her hand under her large sleeves, and to say to the prince, with a mischievous smile :

“ There is no longer room for doubt, monseigneur, that the silence of your Highness is due to timidity, and, too, to German timidity. I am acquainted with that. After the timidity of the scholar, there is none more unconquerable, and, therefore, more venerable, but there are limitations to everything. So, I beg you, monseigneur, recover yourself. I do not think there is anything in me calculated to awe your Highness,” added the marquise, without lifting the veil which concealed her features.

The archduke was unfortunate ; in spite of his desire, he could not find the crushing word, but, feeling how ridiculous his position was becoming, he said ;

“ I do not know, madame, how you dared to present yourself here.”

“ But I present myself here in accordance with your consent, monseigneur.”

“ When you requested an audience yesterday, I did not know your name, madame.”

“ And what has my name done to you, monseigneur ? ”

“ Your name, madame ? Your name ? ”

“ Yes, monseigneur.”

“ Your name has been the scandal of Germany ; you have made the most spiritual of our poets a pagan, an idolater, a materialist.”

“ Indeed, monseigneur,” replied Madeleine, with an accent of simplicity quite provincial, “ that was not my fault.”

“ It was not your fault ? ”

“ And then, where is the great evil, monseigneur ? Your religious poet made mediocre verses, but now he writes magnificent ones.”

“ They are only the more dangerous, madame. And his soul,—his soul ? ”

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"His soul has passed into his verses, monseigneur, so now it is twice immortal."

"And the cardinal legate, madame?"

"At least, you cannot reproach me for having injured his soul, for he had none."

"What, madame! have you not sufficiently vilified the sacred character of the prince of the Church, this priest who until then was so austere, this statesman who for twenty years was the terror of the impious and the seditious? Have you not delivered him to the contempt, the hatred, of wicked people? But for unexpected succour, they would have murdered him; in short, madame, were you not on the point of revolutionising Bologna?"

"Ah, monseigneur, you flatter me."

"And you dare, madame, to present yourself in the palace of a prince who has so much interest in the peace and submission of Germany and Italy? You dare come to ask favours of me,—things that you yourself say are impossible or almost impossible? And in what tone do you make this inconceivable request? In a tone familiar and jesting, as if you were certain of obtaining anything from me. You have made a mistake, madame, a great mistake! I resemble, I give you fair warning, neither the poet, Moser-Hartmann, nor the cardinal legate, nor many others, they say you have bewitched; in truth, your impudence would seem to be more like a dream or nightmare than reality. But who are you then, madame, you who think yourself so far above respect and duty as to treat me as an equal,—me, whom the princesses of royal families approach only with deference?"

"Alas, monsigneur! I am only a poor woman," replied Madeleine.

And she threw back the veil which had concealed her face from the eyes of the archduke.

CHAPTER XV.

THE prince, carried away by the vehemence of his furious indignation, had, as he talked, come nearer and nearer the marquise, who still sat at her ease in the armchair.

When she threw back her veil, at the same time throwing her head back lightly, so as to be able to fix her eyes upon the eyes of the prince, he stood motionless, and experienced that mingling of surprise, admiration, and involuntary pain which almost everybody felt at the sight of that charming face, to which a pallid complexion, large azure blue eyes, black eyebrows, and blonde hair gave a fascination so singular.

This profound impression made upon the prince, Charles Dutertre had also received, notwithstanding his love for his wife, notwithstanding the agonising fears of ruin and disaster by which he was besieged.

For a few seconds the archduke remained, so to speak, under the fascination of this fixed, penetrating gaze, in which the marquise endeavoured to concentrate all the attraction, all the magnetism which was in her, and to cast it into the eyes of the prince, for the projecting power of Madeleine's glance was, so to speak, intermittent, subject, if we may use the expression, to pulsations; so at each of these pulsations, the rebound of which he seemed to feel physically, the archduke started involuntarily; his icy pride appeared to melt like snow in the sun; his haughty attitude seemed to bend; his arrogant countenance betrayed inexpressible uneasiness.

Suddenly Madeleine pulled her veil over her face,

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bowed her head, and tried to efface herself as much as possible under the ample folds of her mantle and trailing robe, which completely hid her small foot, as her wide sleeves hid the beautiful hand she had extended to the prince, who now saw before him only an undefined and chastely veiled form.

The most provoking coquetry, the boldest exposure of personal charms, would have been ingenuousness itself compared to this mysterious reserve, which, concealing from view the whole person from the point of the foot to the tips of the fingers, gave free rein to the imagination, which took fire at the recollection of the wonderful stories of the marquise current in Paris.

When Madeleine's face again disappeared under her veil, the prince, delivered from the influence which had held him in spite of himself, regained his self-possession, roughly curbed his weakness, and, as a safeguard against all dangerous allurement, forced himself to ponder the deplorable adventures which proved how fatal was the power of this woman over men known to be strong and inexorable.

But alas! the fall or transformation of these men only brought back more forcibly the irresistible fascination of the marquise. He felt the grave and imminent peril, but every one knows the attraction of danger.

In vain the prince argued with himself, that, naturally phlegmatic, he had attained the maturity of age without ever having submitted to the empire of those gross passions which degrade men. In vain he said to himself that he was a prince of the royal blood, that he owed it to the sovereign dignity of his rank not to debase himself by yielding to shameful enticements. In a word, the unhappy archduke philosophised marvellously well, but as uselessly as a man who, seeing in terror that he is rolling down a steep declivity, gravely philosophises upon the delightful advantages of repose.

Words, phrases, and pages are necessary to portray

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impressions as instantaneous as thought, and all that we have described at such length, from the moment Madeleine lifted her veil to the moment she dropped it again, transpired in a few seconds, and the archduke, in the midst of his efforts at self-restraint, unconsciously, no doubt,—so much did his philosophy disengage his mind from matter,—tried, we say, yes, tried again to see Madeleine's features through the lace which concealed them.

“I told you, monseigneur,” said the marquise, holding her head down from the covetous and anxious gaze of the archduke, “I told you that I was a poor widow who values her reputation, and who really does not deserve your severity.”

“Madame—”

“Oh, I do not reproach you, monseigneur. You, no doubt, like many others, believe certain rumours—”

“Rumours, madame!” cried the archduke, delighted to feel his anger kindle again. “Rumours! The scandalous apostasy of the poet, Moser-Hartmann, was a rumour, was it?”

“What you call his apostasy is a fact, monseigneur; that may be, but—”

“Perhaps the degradation of the cardinal legate was also a vain rumour?” continued the archduke, impetuously interrupting Madeleine.

“That may be a fact, monseigneur, but—”

“So, madame, you confess yourself that—”

“Pardon me, monseigneur, listen to me. I am called Madeleine; it is the name of a great sinner, as you know.”

“She received pardon, madame.”

“Yes, because she loved much; nevertheless, believe me, monseigneur, I am not seeking an excuse in the example of the life of my patron saint. I have done nothing which requires pardon, no, nothing, absolutely nothing, monseigneur. That seems to astonish you very

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much. So, to make myself entirely understood, which is quite embarrassing, I shall be obliged, at the risk of appearing pedantic, to appeal to the classical knowledge of Your Highness."

"What do you mean, madame?"

"Something very odd; but the acrimony of your reproaches, as well as other reasons, compels me to a confession, or rather to a very singular justification."

"Madame, explain yourself."

"You know, monseigneur, upon what condition the vestal virgins at Rome were chosen?"

"Certainly, madame," replied the prince, with a modest blush, and, he added, ingenuously, "but I cannot see what relation —"

"Ah, well, monseigneur," interrupted Madeleine, smiling at the Germanism of the prince, "if we were at Rome under the empire of the Caesars, I would have every possible right to keep the sacred fire on the altar of the chaste goddess. In a word, I am a widow without ever having been married; because, upon my return from Europe the Marquis de Miranda, my relative and benefactor, died, and he married me on his death-bed that he might leave me his name and his fortune."

The accent of truth is irresistible, and the prince at once believed the words of Madeleine, in spite of the amazement produced by this revelation so diametrically opposite to the rumours of adventures and gallantries which were rife about the marquise.

The astonishment of the prince was mingled with a vague satisfaction which he did not care to estimate. However, fearing he might fall into a snare, he said, no longer with passion, but with a sorrowful recrimination:

"You count too much on my credulity, madame. What! when just now you confessed to me that—"

"I beg your pardon, monseigneur; do me the favour to reply to a few questions."

"Speak, madame."

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“ You certainly have all the valiant exterior of a man of war, monseigneur, and when I saw you in Vienna, mounted on your beautiful battle-horse, proudly cross the Prater, followed by your aides-de-camp, I often said, ‘ That is my type of an army general ; there is a man made to command soldiers.’ ”

“ You saw me in Vienna ? ” asked the archduke, whose voice softened singularly. “ You observed me there ? ”

“ Fortunately you did not know it, monseigneur, or you would have exiled me, would you not ? ”

“ Well,” replied the prince, smiling, “ I fear so.”

“ Come, that is gallantry ; I like you better so. I was saying to you, then, monseigneur, that you have the exterior of a valiant man of war, and your character responds to this exterior. But will you not confess to me that sometimes the most martial figure may hide a poltroon — ”

“ No one better understands that than I. I had under my orders a major-general who had the most ferocious-looking personality that could be imagined, and he was the most arrant coward.”

“ You will admit again, monseigneur, that sometimes the most contemptible-looking personality may hide a hero.”

“ Certainly, Frederick the Great, Prince Eugene, were not great in manner — ”

“ Alas ! monseigneur, it is even so, and I, on the contrary, am different from these great men ; unfortunately, I have too much manner.”

“ What do you mean, madame ? ”

“ Ah, my God, yes ! I am like the coward who makes everybody tremble by his stern appearance, and who is really more afraid than the most cowardly of the cowards he intimidates. In a word, I inspire that which I do not feel ; picture to yourself, monseigneur, the poor icicle carrying around him flame and conflagration. And I

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would have the presumption to call myself a phenomenon if I did not recollect that the beautiful fruits of my country, so bright-coloured, so delicate, so fragrant, awaken in me a furious appetite, without sharing the least in the world the fine appetite they give, or ever feeling the slightest desire to be crunched. It is so with me, monseigneur, it seems that as innocently as the fruits of my country I excite, in some respects, the hunger of an ogre, I who am of a cenobitic frugality. So now I have concluded to be no longer astonished at the influence I exercise involuntarily, but as, after all, this action is powerful, inasmuch as it excites the most violent passions of men, I try to elicit the best that is possible from my victims, either for themselves or for the good of others, and that, I swear without coquetry, deception, or promises, if one says to me, ‘I am passionately in love with you,’ I answer, ‘Well, cherish your passion, perhaps its fire will melt my ice, perhaps the lava will hide itself in me under the snow. Fan your flame, then, let it burn until it wins me; I ask nothing better, for I am as free as the air, and I am twenty-two years old.’”

As she uttered these words, Madeleine raised her head, lifted her veil, and gazed intently at the archduke.

The marquise spoke truly, for her passion for her blond archangel, of whom she had talked to Sophie Dutertre, had never had anything terrestrial in it.

The prince believed Madeleine; first, because truth almost always carries conviction with it, then, because he felt happy in putting faith in the words of the young woman. He blushed less in acknowledging to himself the profound and sudden impression produced on him by this singular creature, when he realised that, after all, she had been worthy of guarding the sacred fire of Vesta; so, the imprudent man, his eyes fixed on the eyes of Madeleine, contemplating them with passionate eagerness, drank at leisure the enchanted love-potion.

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Madeleine resumed, smiling :

“At this moment, monseigneur, you are asking yourself, I am sure, a question which I often ask myself.”

“What is that, pray ?”

“You are asking yourself (to speak like an old-time romance), ‘Who is he who will make me share his passion ?’ Ah, well, I, too, am very anxious to penetrate the future on this subject.”

“That future, nevertheless, depends on you.”

“No, monseigneur, to draw music from the lyre, some one must make it vibrate.”

“And who will that happy mortal be ?”

“My God ! who knows ? Perhaps you, monseigneur.”

“I !” cried the prince, charmed, transported. “I !”

“I say perhaps.”

“Oh, what must I do ?”

“Please me.”

“And how shall I do that ?”

“Listen, monseigneur.”

“I pray you, do not call me monseigneur ; it is too ceremonious.”

“Oh, oh, monseigneur ; it is a great favour for a prince to be treated with familiarity ; he must deserve it. You ask me how you may please me. I will give you not an example, but a fact. The poet, Moser-Hartmann, whose apostasy you say I caused, addressed to me the most singular remark in the world. One day he met me at the house of a mutual friend, looked at me a long time, and then said, with an air of angry alarm : ‘Madame, for the peace of spirituality, you ought to be buried alive !’ And he went out, but next day he came to see me, madly in love, a victim, he told me, to a sudden passion,—as sudden and novel as it was uncontrollable. ‘Let your passion burn,’ I said to him, ‘but hear the advice of a friend ; the passion devours you, let it flow in your verse. Become a great poet, and perhaps your glory will intoxicate me.’ ”

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"And did the inebriation ever come to you?" said the prince.

"No, but glory has come to my lover to console him, and a poet can be consoled for the loss of everything by glory. Ah, well, monseigneur, have I used my influence well or ill?"

Suddenly the archduke started.

A keen suspicion pierced his heart. Dissimulating this painful doubt, he said to Madeleine, with a forced smile:

"But, madame, your adventure with the cardinal legate did not have so happy an end for him. What is left to console him?"

"There rests with him the consciousness of having delivered a country that abhorred him from his presence," replied Madeleine, gaily. "Is there nothing in that, monseigneur?"

"Come now, between us, what interest had you in making this unhappy man the victim of a terrible scandal?"

"How! What interest, monseigneur? What but the interest of unmasking an infamous hypocrite, of chasing him out of a city that he oppressed,—in short, to cover him with contempt and shame. 'I believe in your passion,' said I to him, 'and perhaps I may share it if you will mask as a Hungarian hussar, and come with me to the ball of the Rialto, my dear cardinal; it is an extravagant, foolish caprice on my part, no doubt, but that is my condition, and, besides, who will recognise you under the mask?' This horrible priest had his head turned; he accepted, and I destroyed him."

"And you will destroy me, madame, as you did the cardinal legate," cried the archduke, rising and making a supreme effort to break the charm whose irresistible power he already felt. "I see the snare; I have enemies; you wish by your perfidious seductions, to drag me into some dangerous proceeding, and afterwards to

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hand me over to the contempt and ridicule that my weakness would deserve. But, bless God ! he has opened my eyes in time. I recognise with horror that infernal fascination which took from me the use of my reason, and which was not love even,— no, I yielded to the grossest, most degrading passion which can lower man to the level of a brute, to that passion which, to my shame and to yours, I desire to stigmatise aloud as lust, madame!"

Madeleine shrugged her shoulders and began to laugh derisively, then rising from her seat and walking up to the prince, who had stepped back to the chimney, she took him gently by the hand, and led him back to a chair near her own, without his having the strength to resist this peaceable violence.

"Do me the favour to listen to me, monseigneur," said Madeleine. "I have only a few more words to say to you, and then you will not see the Marquise de Miranda again in your life."

CHAPTER XVI.

WHEN Madeleine had seated the prince near her, she said to him :

“ Listen, monsieur, I will be frank, so frank that I defy you not to believe me. I came here with the hope of turning your head.”

“ So,” cried the prince, astonished, “ you confess it!”

“ Entirely. That end attained, I wished to use my influence over you, to obtain, as I told you, monsieur, at the beginning of our interview, two things, one considered almost impossible, the other as altogether impossible.”

“ You are right, madame, to defy me not to believe you,” replied the prince, with a constrained smile. “ I believe you.”

“ The two deeds that I wished to obtain from you were great, noble, and generous; they would have made you esteemed and respected. That is very far, I think, from wishing to abuse my influence over you to excite you to evil or indignity, as you suppose.”

“ Well, madame, come to the point; what is it?”

“ First, an act of clemency, or rather of justice, which would rally around you a multitude of hearts in Lombardy,—the free and full pardon of Colonel Pernetti.”

The prince jumped up from his chair, and exclaimed :

“ Never, madame, never!”

“ The free and full pardon of Colonel Pernetti, one of the most honoured men in all Italy,” pursued Madeleine, without noticing the interruption of the prince. “ The reasonable pride of this noble-hearted man will prevent

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his asking you for the slightest alleviation of his woes, but come generously to his relief, and his gratitude will assure you of his devotion."

"I repeat to you, madame, that important reasons of state oppose your request. It is impossible, altogether impossible."

"To be sure. I began, you know, by telling you that, monseigneur. As to the other thing, doubtless more impossible still, it simply concerns your consent to the marriage of a young man whom you have brought up."

"I!" cried the archduke, as if he could not believe his ears. "I, consent to the marriage of Count Frantz?"

"I do not know if he is a count, but I do know that his name is Frantz, since it was told me this morning by Mlle. Antonine Hubert, an angel of sweetness and beauty, whom I have loved from her childhood, and for whom I feel the tenderness of a mother and a sister."

"Madame, in three hours from this moment Count Frantz will have left Paris, — that is my reply."

"My God, monseigneur, that is admirable! All this is impossible, absolutely impossible. I say again, I admit that it is impossible!"

"Then, madame, why do you ask it?"

"Why, to obtain it, of course, monseigneur."

"What! notwithstanding all I have just said to you, you dare hope still?"

"I have that presumption, monseigneur."

"Such self-conceit —"

"Is very modest because I am not counting on my presence."

"On what, then, madame, do you rely?"

"On my absence, monseigneur," said Madeleine, rising.

"On your absence?"

"On your remembrance, if you prefer it."

"You are going," said the prince, unable to conceal his regret and vexation, "you are going so soon?"

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" It is my last and only means of bringing you to an agreement."

" But really, madame — "

" Wait, monseigneur, do you wish me to tell you what is going to happen ?"

" Let us hear, madame."

" I am going to leave you. At first you will be relieved of a great burden ; my presence will no longer beset you with all sorts of temptations, which have their agony as well as their charm ; you will banish me entirely from your thoughts. Unfortunately, by degrees, and in spite of yourself, I will return to occupy your thoughts ; my mysterious, veiled figure will follow you everywhere ; you will feel still more how little there is of the platonie in your inclination toward me, and these sentiments will become only more irritating and more obstinate. To-morrow, the next day, perhaps, reflecting that, after all, I asked noble and generous actions only of you, you will bitterly regret my departure, but it will be too late, monseigneur."

" Too late ?"

" Too late for you ; not for me. I have taken it into my head that Colonel Pernetti will have his pardon, and that Count Frantz will marry Antonine. You understand, monseigneur, that it must be."

" In spite of me ?"

" In spite of you."

" That would be rather difficult."

" So it is. But, let us see, monseigneur, to mention to you only facts which you already know ; when one has known how to induce the cardinal legate to masquerade as a Hungarian hussar, when one has known how to create a great poet by the fire of a single glance, when one has known how to render amorous — and I humbly confess I use the expression in its earthly sense — a man like you, monseigneur, it is evident that one can accomplish something else also. You force, do you not,

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this poor Count Frantz to leave Paris? But the journey is long, and before he is out of France I have two days before me. A little delay in the pardon of Colonel Pernetti will be nothing for him, and, after all, his pardon does not depend on you alone, monseigneur; you cannot imagine to what point the rebound of influence may reach, and, thank God, here in France I have the means and the liberty to act. Is it war that you wish, monseigneur? Then let it be war. I depart, and I leave you already wounded,—that is to say, in love. Ah, my God! although I have a right to be proud of my success, it is not vanity which makes me insist upon the sudden impression I have made on you; because, to tell the truth, I have not employed the least coquetry in all this; almost always I have kept my veil down, and I am dressed as a veritable grandmother. Well, good-bye, monseigneur. At least do me the favour to accompany me to the door of your front parlour; war does not forbid courtesy."

The archduke was in unutterable uneasiness of mind. He felt that Madeleine was speaking the truth, for, already, at the bare thought of seeing her depart, perhaps for ever, he experienced a real sorrow; then, reflecting that if the charm, the singular and almost irresistible attraction of this woman could act so powerfully on him, who for so many reasons believed himself protected from such an influence, as well as from others which might induce him to submit to this control, he felt a sort of vague but bitter and angry jealousy; and while he could not make up his mind to grant the pardon asked of him, or to consent to the marriage of Frantz, he tried, like all undecided minds, to temporise, and said to the marquise, with emotion:

"Since I cannot see you again, at least prolong your visit a little."

"For what purpose, monseigneur?"

"It matters little to you if it makes me happy."

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"It would not by any means make you happy, monseigneur, because you have neither the strength to let me depart nor to grant me what I ask of you."

"That is true," answered the prince, sighing, "for one request seems as impossible to me as the other."

"Ah, to-morrow, after my departure, how you will repent!"

The prince, after a long silence, said, with effort, yet with the most insinuating voice :

"Wait, my dear marquise, let us suppose that which is not supposable, that perhaps some day I may think of granting the pardon of Pernetti."

"A supposition? perhaps some day you will think of it? How vague and unsatisfactory all that is, monseigneur! Why not say, positively, 'Admit that I grant you the pardon of Colonel Pernetti.'"

"Very well, then, admit it."

"Good; you grant me this pardon, monseigneur, and you consent to the marriage of Frantz? I must have all or nothing."

"As to the marriage, never, never!"

"Do not say never, monseigneur. Do you know anything about it?"

"After all, a supposition binds me to nothing. Well, to make an end of it, let us admit that I grant all you desire. I will be at least certain of my recompence —"

"You ask it of me, monseigneur? Is not every generous action its own reward?"

"Granted. But there is one, in my eyes the most precious of all, and that one you alone can give."

"Oh, make no conditions, monseigneur."

"Why?"

"Frankly, monseigneur, can I pledge myself to anything? Does not all depend on you and not on me? You must please me, that concerns you."

"Oh! what a woman you are!" said the prince, with

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vexation. "But, really, shall I please you? Do you think I can please you?"

"My faith, monseigneur, I know nothing about it. You have done nothing so far but receive me with rudeness, I can truthfully say."

"My God! I was wrong, forgive me; if you only knew the uneasiness, I might almost say the fear, that you inspire in me, my dear marquise!"

"Come, I forgive you the past, monseigneur, and promise you to allow myself to be captivated with the best will in the world, and, as I am very frank, I will even add that it does seem to me that I would like you so much that you might succeed."

"Truly!" cried the prince, transported.

"Yes; you are half a sovereign, and you perhaps will be one some day, and there may be all sorts of good and beautiful things for you to order through the influence of this consuming passion you have just branded like a real capuchin,—allow me the expression. Come, monseigneur, if the good God has put this passion in all his creatures, he knew what he was doing. It is an immense power, because, in the hope of satisfying it, those who are under its influence are capable of everything, even the most generous actions, is it not true, monseigneur?"

"So," added the prince, with increasing rapture, "I can hope—"

"Hope all at your ease, monseigneur, but, I tell you plainly, I bind myself to nothing. My faith! fan your flame, make it burn, let it melt my snow."

"But, in a word, suppose that I grant all that you ask, what would you feel for me?"

"Perhaps this first proof of devotion to my wishes would make a deep impression upon me, but I cannot assert it, my power of divination does not extend so far as that, monseigneur."

"Ah, you are pitiless!" cried the archduke, with a

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vexation that had a touch of sorrow in it, “you only know how to exact.”

“Would it be better to make false promises, monseigneur? That would be worthy neither of you nor of me, and then, in a word, let us speak as people who have hearts. Once more, what is it I ask of you? to show justice and mercy to the most honourable of men, and paternal affection for the orphan you have reared! If you only knew how these poor orphans love each other! What innocence! what tenderness! what despair! This morning, as she told me of the ruin of her hopes, Antonine was moved to tears.”

“Frantz is of illustrious birth. I have other plans and other views for him,” replied the prince, impatiently. “He ought not to make a misalliance.”

“The word is a pretty one. And then who am I, monseigneur? Magdalena Pérès, daughter of an honest Mexican merchant, ruined by failures in business, and a marquise by chance. You love me, nevertheless, without fear of misalliance.”

“Ah, madame! I! I!”

“You, you, it is another thing, is it not? as the comedy says.”

“At least, I am free in my actions.”

“And why should not Frantz be free in his, when his tastes restrain him to a modest and honourable life, adorned by a pure and noble love? Come, monseigneur, if you were, as you say, smitten with me, how tenderly you would compassionate the despairing love of those two poor children, who adore each other with all the ardour and innocence of their age! If passion does not render you better and more generous, this passion is not true, and if I am to share it I must begin by believing in it, which I cannot do when I see your relentless cruelty to Frantz.”

“Ah, my God, if I loved him less I would not be relentless!”

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“A singular way to love people!”

“Have I not told you that I intended him for a high destiny?”

“And I tell you, monseigneur, that the high destiny you reserve for him would be odious to him. He is born for a happy, sweet, and modest life; his tastes are simple, the timidity of his character, his qualities even, separate him from all that is showy and pompous; is it not true?”

“Then,” said the prince, greatly surprised, “you are acquainted with him?”

“I have never seen him.”

“How, then, do you know?”

“Has not this dear Antonine given me all her confidence? Is it not true that, according to the way you love people, you are able to divine their true character? In a word, monseigneur, the character of Frantz is such as I have described, is it not,—yes or no?”

“It is true, such is his character.”

“And you would have the cruelty to impose upon him an existence which would be insupportable to him, when there under his hand he would find the happiness of his life?”

“But, know that I love Frantz as my own son, and I will never consent to be separated from him.”

“Great pleasure for you to have constantly under your eyes the sad face of a poor creature whose eternal misery you have caused! Besides, Antonine is an orphan; nothing forbids her accompanying Frantz; in the place of one child, you would have two. What a relief from your grandeur, from the adulations of a false and selfish and artificial society would the sight of this sweet and smiling happiness be to you; with what joy would you go to refresh your heart and soul in the home of these two children who would cherish you with all the happiness they would owe to you!”

“Stop, leave me,” cried the prince, more and more

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moved. “I do not know what inconceivable power your words have, but I feel my firmest resolutions give way, I feel the convictions of my whole life growing weak.”

“Do you complain of that, monseigneur! Hold! Between us, without detracting from prinees, I think they would often do well to renounce the convictions of all their life, for God knows what these convictions may be. Come, believe me, yield to the impression which now dominates you, it is good and generous.”

“Ah, my God, in this moment do I know how to distinguish good from evil?”

“For that, monseigneur, interrogate the faces of those whose happiness you have assured; when you will say to one, ‘Go, poor exile; return to the country that you weep; your brothers wait for you with open arms,’ and to the other, ‘My beloved child, be happy, marry Antonine,’ then look well at both, monseigneur, and if tears moisten their eyes, as at this moment they moisten yours and mine, be tranquil, monseigneur, you have done good, and for this good, to encourage you because your emotion touches me, I promise you to accompany Antonine to Germany.”

“Truly,” cried the prince, “you promise me?”

“I must, monseigneur,” said Madeleine, smiling, “give you the opportunity to captivate me.”

“Ah, well, whatever may happen, whatever you may do, for perhaps you are making sport of me,” said the prince, throwing himself at Madeleine’s knees, “I give you my royal word that I will pardon the exile, that I—”

The archduke was suddenly interrupted by a violent noise outside the door of his study, a noise which revealed the sharp contention of several voices, above which rose distinctly the words :

“I tell you, sir, you shall not enter!”

The archduke got up from his position suddenly, turned pale with anger, and said to Madeleine, who was listening also to the noise with great surprise :

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“ I beseech you, go into the next chamber; something extraordinary is taking place. In an instant I will rejoin you.”

At that moment a violent blow resounded behind the door.

The prince added, as he went to open the adjacent room for Madeleine:

“ Enter there, please.”

Then, closing the door, and wishing in his anger to know the cause of this insolent and unusual noise, he went out of his study quickly, and saw M. Pascal, whom two exasperated officers were trying to restrain.

CHAPTER XVII.

AT the sight of the archduke, the officers turned aside respectfully, and M. Pascal, who seemed to have lost control of himself, cried :

“ Zounds ! monseigneur, you receive people here singularly ! ”

The prince, remembering the appointment that he had made with M. Pascal, and fearing for his own dignity some new insult from this brutal person, said, making a sign to him :

“ Come, monsieur, come.”

And before the eyes of the silent officers the door closed on the prince and the capitalist.

“ Now, monsieur,” said the archduke, pale with anger and hardly able to restrain himself, “ will you tell me the cause of this scandal ? ”

“ What ! you make an appointment for me at three o’clock ; I am punctual ; a quarter of an hour passes,—nobody ; a half-hour,—nobody ; my faith ! I lose patience, and I ask one of your officers to inform you that I am waiting. They answer that you have an audience. I begin to champ my bit, and at last, at the end of another half-hour, I tell your gentlemen, positively, that if they do not inform you I will go in myself.”

“ That, monsieur, is an insolence — ”

“ What, an insolence ! Ah, well, monseigneur, is it I who have need of you, or you who have need of me ? ”

“ M. Pascal ! ”

“ Is it I who come to you, monseigneur ? Is it I who have asked for the loan of money ? ”

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“ But, monsieur — ”

“ But, monseigneur, when I consent to interrupt my own business to come here and wait in your antechamber, — what I do for nobody, — it seems to me that you ought not to let me go to the devil for one hour, and the most important hour, too, on the Exchange, which, thanks to you, monseigneur, I have missed to-day ; and in addition to that vexation, I think it very strange that your officers repulse me, when, on their refusal to announce me, I take the liberty of announcing myself.”

“ Discretion and the simplest propriety command you to wait the end of the audience I was giving, monsieur.”

“ That is possible, monseigneur, but, unfortunately, my just impatience contradicts discretion, and, frankly, I think I deserve a different reception, especially when I come to talk with you of a service that you have implored me to do for you.”

In the first moment of his anger, increased by the persistent coarseness of M. Pascal, the prince had forgotten that the Marquise de Miranda could hear his conversation with his rude visitor from the adjoining room ; so, overwhelmed with shame and feeling the necessity of appeasing the angry humour of the man, he endeavoured with all his self-control to appear calm, and tried to lead M. Pascal, as he talked with him, over to the embrasure of one of the windows, where Madeleine would not be able to hear the interview.

“ You know, M. Pascal,” said he, “ that I have always been very tolerant of your bluntness, and I will continue to be so.”

“ Really, you are very good, monseigneur,” replied Pascal, sarcastically, “ but you see each one of us has his little contrarieties, and at the present moment I have very large ones, which make it impossible for me to possess the gentleness of a lamb.”

“ That excuse, or, rather, that explanation suffices for me, M. Pascal,” replied the prince, dominated by

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his need of the financier's services. "Opposition often exasperates the gentlest characters, but let us talk no longer of the past. You asked me to anticipate by two days the appointment we had made to terminate our business. I hope that you bring me a satisfactory reply."

"I bring you a thoroughly complete yes, monseigneur," replied our hero, growing gentle. And he drew a pocketbook from his pocket. "And more, to corroborate this yes, here is a draft on the Bank of France for the tenth of the amount, and this contract of mine for the remainder of the loan."

"Ah, my dear M. Pascal!" cried the prince, radiant, "you are a man — a man of gold."

"'A man of gold!' that is the word, monseigneur. That is no doubt the cause of your liking for me."

The prince did not observe this sarcasm. Delighted with the whole day, which seemed to fulfil his various desires, and impatient to dismiss the financier so as to return to Madeleine, he said :

"Since all is settled, my dear M. Pascal, we need only exchange our signatures, and to-morrow or after, at your hour, we will regulate the matter completely."

"I understand, monseigneur; once the money and the signature in your pocket, the keenest desire of your heart is to rid yourself as soon as possible of your very humble servant, Pascal, and to-morrow you will turn him over to some subaltern charged with the power of arranging the affair."

"Monsieur!"

"Good! monseigneur, is not that the natural course of things? Before the loan, one is a good genius, a half or three-quarters of God; once the money is loaned, one is a Jew or an Arab. I know this, it is the other side of the medallion. Do not hasten, monseigneur, to turn over the said medallion."

"Really, monsieur, you must explain yourself."

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“ Immediately, monseigneur, for I am in a hurry. The money is there, my signature is there,” added he, striking the pocketbook. “ The affair is concluded on one condition.”

“ Still conditions ?”

“ Each, monseigneur, manages his little affairs as he understands them. My condition, however, is very simple.”

“ Let us hear it, monsieur, let us come to an end.”

“ Yesterday I told you that I observed a handsome blond young man in the garden, where he was promenading, who lives here, you inform me.”

“ Without doubt, it is Count Frantz, my godson.”

“ Certainly, one could not see a prettier boy, I told you. Now then, as you are the godfather of this pretty boy, you ought to have some influence over him, ought you not ?”

“ What are you aiming at, monsieur ?”

“ Monseigneur, in the interest of your dear godson, I will tell you in confidence that I think the air of Paris is bad for him.”

“ What !”

“ Yes, and you would do wisely to send him back to Germany ; his health would improve very much, monseigneur, very much indeed.”

“ Is this a pleasantry, monsieur ?”

“ It is serious, monseigneur, so serious that the only condition that I put to the conclusion of our affair is that you must make your godson depart for Germany in twenty-four hours at the latest.”

“ Truly, monsieur, I cannot recover from my surprise. What interest have you in the departure of Frantz ? It is inexplicable.”

“ I am going to explain myself, monseigneur, and that you may better understand the interest I have in his departure, I must make you a confidence ; that will enable me to point out exactly what I expect from you.

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Now then, monseigneur, such as you see me I am madly in love. Eh, my God! yes, madly in love; that seems queer to you and to me also. But the fact remains. I am in love with a young girl named Mlle. Antonine Hubert, your neighbour."

" You, monsieur, you!" exclaimed the prince, dismayed.

" Certainly, me! Me! Pascal! And why not, monsieur? 'Love is of every age,' says the song. Only, as it is also of the age of your godson, Count Frantz, he has in the most innocent way in the world begun to love Mlle. Antonine; she, not less innocently, returns the love of this pretty boy, which places me, you see, in an exceedingly disobliging frame of mind; fortunately, you can assist me in getting out of this frame of mind, monseigneur."

" I?"

" Yes, monseigneur; I will tell you how. Assure me that you will require Count Frantz to leave France this instant,—and that is easy,—and demand also that he is not to set foot in France for several years; the rest belongs to me."

" But there is another thing you do not think of, monsieur. If this young person loves Frantz?"

" The rest belongs to me, I tell you, monseigneur. President Hubert has not two days to live; my batteries are ready, the little girl will be forced to go to live with an old relative who is horribly covetous and avaricious; a hundred thousand francs will answer to me for this old vixen, and once she gets the little girl in her clutches I swear to God that Antonine will become, willing or unwilling, Madame Pascal, and that, too, without resorting to violence. Come now, monseigneur, all the love affairs of fifteen years will not hold against the desire to become, I will not say madame the archduchess, but madame the archmillionaire. Now, monseigneur, you see it all, I have frankly played the cards on the

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table ; having no interest in acting otherwise, it is of little or no moment to you that your godson should marry a little girl who has not a cent. The condition that I impose is the easiest possible one to fulfil. Again, is it yes, or is it no ? ”

The prince was overwhelmed, less by the plans of Pascal and his odious misanthropy, than by the cruel alternative in which the condition imposed by the capitalist placed him.

To order the departure of Frantz, and oppose his marriage with Antonine, was to lose Madeleine ; to refuse the condition imposed by M. Pascal was to renounce the loan, which would enable him to accomplish his projects of ambitious aggrandisement.

In the midst of this conflict of two violent passions, the prince recollects that he had only given his word to Madeleine for the pardon of the exile, the tumult caused by the fury of M. Pascal having interrupted him at the very moment he was about to swear to Madeleine to consent to the marriage of Frantz.

Notwithstanding the facility which this evasion left to him, the archduke realised how powerful was the influence of Madeleine over him, as that morning even he had not hesitated to sacrifice Frantz to his ambition.

The hesitation and perplexity of the prince struck Pascal with increasing surprise ; he could not believe that his demand concerning Frantz was the only question ; however, to influence the determination of the prince by placing before him the consequences of his refusal, he broke the silence, and said :

“ Really, monseigneur, your hesitation is incomprehensible ! What ! by a weak deference to the love affair of a schoolboy, you renounce the certainty of obtaining a crown ? For, after all, the duchy whose transfer is offered to you is sovereign and independent. This transfer, my loan only can put it in your power to accept, which, I may say in passing, is not a little flatter-





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ing to the good man Pascal. Because, in a word, through the might of his little savings, he can make or unmake sovereigns, he can permit or prevent that pretty commerce where these simpletons of people sell and sell again, transfer and reassign, no more nor less than if it were a park of cattle or sheep. But that does not concern me at all. I am not a politician, but you are, monseigneur, and I do not understand your hesitation. Once more, is it yes ? is it no ?"

"It is no!" said Madelaine, coming suddenly out of the adjoining room, where she had heard the preceding conversation, notwithstanding the precautions of the prince.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE archduke, at the unexpected appearance of the Marquise de Miranda, shared the surprise of M. Pascal, who looked at Madeleine with amazement, supposing her a guest of the palace, for she had taken off her hat, and her singular beauty shone in all its splendour. The shadow thrown by the rim of her hat, which hid a part of her forehead and cheeks, was no longer there, and the bright light of broad day, heightening the transparent purity of her dark, pale complexion, gilded the light curls of her magnificent blond hair, and gave to the azure of her large eyes, with long black eyebrows, that sparkling clearness that the rays of the sun give to the blue of a tranquil sea. Madeleine, her cheek slightly flushed by the indignation which this odious project of Pascal had aroused, her glance animated, her nostrils dilating, her head proudly thrown back on her slender, beautiful neck, advanced to the middle of the parlour, and, addressing the financier, repeated the words :

“ No, the prince will not accept the condition which you have the audacity to impose upon him, monsieur.”

“ Madame ! ” stammered M. Pascal, feeling his usual effrontery forsaking him, and recoiling, intimidated, pained, and charmed at the same time, “ I do not know who you are, I do not know by what right you — ”

“ Come, monseigneur,” continued the marquise, addressing the archduke, “ resume your dignity, not as a prince, but as a man ; receive the humiliating condition which he imposes on you with the contempt which it deserves. Great God ! at what price would you buy an

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increase of power ? What ! You would have the courage to pick up your sovereign crown at the feet of this man ? It would desile your brow ! But a man of courage would not have endured the thousandth part of the outrages which you have just brooked, monseigneur. And you a prince ! You so proud ! You belong to those who believe themselves of a race superior to the vulgar herd. And so for your humble courtiers, your base flatterers, your intimidated followers, you have only haughtiness, and before M. Pascal you abase your sovereign pride ! And this, then, is the power of money ! ” added Madeleine, with increasing exaltation, hurling the words at the financier with a gesture of crushing disdain, “ you bow before this man ! God have mercy ! This is to-day the king of kings ! Think of it, prince, think then that what makes the power and the insolence of this man is your ambition. Come, monseigneur, instead of buying by a shameful degradation the fragile plaything of a sovereign rank, renounce this poor vanity, retake your rights as a man of courage, and you will be able to drive this man away ignominiously, who treats you more insolently than you have ever treated the meanest of your poor vassals.”

Pascal, since his accession of fortune, was accustomed to a despotic domination as well as to the timid deference of those whose fate he held in his hands ; judge, then, of his violent shock, of his rage, in hearing himself thus addressed by the most attractive, if not the most beautiful woman he had ever met. Picture his exasperation as he thought he must, doubtless, renounce the hope of marrying Antonine, and lose besides the profit of the ducal loan, an excellent investment for him ; so he cried, with a threatening air :

“ Madame, take care ; this power of money, which you treat so contemptuously, is able to command many resources for the service of revenge. Take care ! ”

“ Thank God ! the threat is good, and it frightens me

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very much," said Madeleine, with a burst of sarcastic laughter, stopping by a gesture the prince, who took a quick step toward Pascal. "Your power is great, do you say, Sir Strong-box! It is true money is an immense power. I have seen at Frankfort a little old man, who said in 1830 to two or three furious kings, 'You wish to make war on France; it does not suit me or my family, and I will not give you the money to pay your troops;' and there was no war. This good old man, a hundred times richer than you, M. Pascal, occupied the humble house of his father and lived upon little, while his beneficent name is inscribed on twenty splendid monuments of public usefulness. He is called the 'king of the people,' and his name is blessed as much as yours is shamed and hissed, M. Pascal! For your reputation as a true and honest man is as well known to the foreigner as in France. Certainly, oh, you are known, M. Pascal, too well known, because you do not imagine how much your delicacy, your scrupulous probity, is appreciated! And what is the object of universal consideration, the honourable course, by which you have made your immense fortune? All that has given you a very wide-spread reputation, M. Pascal, and I am happy to declare it under present circumstances."

"Madame," replied Pascal, with an icy calmness more terrible than his anger, "you know many things, but you do not know the man whom you provoke. You are ignorant of what this man, this Strong-box as you call him, can do."

The prince made a threatening gesture which Madeleine again checked, then, shrugging her shoulders, she continued :

"What I do know, M. Pascal, is that, notwithstanding your audacity, your impudence, or your strong-box, you will never marry Mlle. Antonine Hubert, who will be betrothed to-morrow to Count Frantz de Neuberg, as monseigneur can assure you."

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And the marquise, without waiting for the reply of Pascal, made a half-mocking bow and returned to the adjoining chamber. Excited by the generous indignation of Madeleine's words, more and more subjugated by her beauty, which had just appeared to him under a new light, the archduke, feeling all the bitterness, all the anger accumulated by the many insolences of Pascal, revive in his heart, experienced the joy of the slave at last freed from a detested yoke. At the impassioned voice of the young woman the wicked soul of this prince, hardened by the pride of race, frozen by the atmosphere of mute adulation in which he had always lived, had at least some noble impulses, and the blush of shame covered the brow of this haughty man as he realised to what a state of abjection he had descended to gain the favour of M. Pascal.

The financier, no longer intimidated or handicapped by the presence of the marquise, felt his audacity spring up again, and, turning abruptly to the prince, he said, with the habitual brutal sarcasm in which was mingled a jealous hatred to see the archduke in possession of so beautiful a mistress,—for such at least was Pascal's belief :

“ Zounds ! I am no longer astonished, monseigneur, at having stood so long like a crane on one foot in your antechamber. You were, I see, occupied with fine company. I am a fine judge and I compliment your taste ; but men like us are not under petticoat government, and I think you know your interests too well to renounce my loan and take seriously the words you have just heard, and which I shall not forget, because I—I am sorry for you, monseigneur,” added Pascal, whose rage redoubled his effrontery,—“ in spite of her beautiful eyes, I must have revenge for the outrages of this too adorable person.”

“ M. Pascal,” said the prince, triumphant at the thought of avenging himself, “ M. Pascal ! ” and with a



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significant gesture he showed him the door; “leave this room, and never set your foot here again!”

“Monseigneur, these words—”

“M. Pascal,” repeated the prince, in a louder voice, reaching his hand to the bell-cord, “go out of this room instantly, or I will have you put out.”

There is ordinarily so much cowardice in insolence, so much baseness in avarice, that M. Pascal, overwhelmed at the prospect of the destruction of his hopes as well as the loss of his profit on the loan, repented too late his brutality, and, becoming as abject as he had been arrogant, said to the prince, in a pitiful voice:

“Monseigneur, I was jesting. I thought your Highness, in deigning to allow me to talk frankly, would be amused at my whims; that is why I permitted myself to say such improper things. Can your Highness suppose that I would dare cherish the least resentment for the pleasantries this charming lady addressed to me? I am too gallant, too much of a French knight for that. I will even ask your Highness, in case, as I hope, the loan takes place, to offer to this respectable lady what we men of the strong-box, as she so amusingly called us just now, call pin-money for her toilet,—a few rolls of a thousand louis. Ladies always have some little purchases to make, and—”

“M. Pascal,” said the prince, who enjoyed this humiliation which he had not the courage to inflict on Pascal, “you are a miserable scoundrel. Go out!”

“Ah, so, monseigneur! Do you mean seriously to treat me in this way?” cried Pascal.

The prince without replying rang vigorously; an officer entered.

“You see that man,” said the archduke, indicating Pascal by a gesture; “look at him.”

“Yes, monseigneur.”

“Do you know his name?”

“Yes, monseigneur; it is M. Pascal.”

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“Would you recognise him again?”

“Perfectly, monseigneur.”

“Very well. Conduct this man to the door of the vestibule, and if he ever has the impudence to present himself here, drive him away in disgrace.”

“We will not fail to do it, monseigneur,” replied the officer, who with his comrades had endured the insolence of M. Pascal.

Our hero, realising the ruin of his hopes, and having no longer a point to gain, recovered his audacity, held up his head and said to the prince, who, sufficiently avenged, was eager to join Madeleine in the adjoining chamber :

“Wait, M. archduke, the courage and baseness of both of us are of the same feather,—the other day I was strong for reason of your cowardice, as now you are strong for reason of mine. The only brave person here is that damned woman with the black eyebrows and blond hair; but I will have my revenge on her and on you !”

The prince, angered at being thus addressed in the presence of one of his subordinates, became purple, and stamped his foot in fury.

“Will you go out, sir ?” cried the officer, putting his hand on the hilt of his sword, as a threat to M. Pascal. “Out of here, or, if not—”

“Softly, M. fighter,” replied Pascal, coolly, as he retired, “softly, sir, they do not cut up people with a sword here, you see ! And we are in France, you see ! And we have, you see, some good little commissaries of police who receive the complaints of an honest citizen who is maltreated.”

M. Pascal went out of the palace steeped in rancour, devoured with hate, bursting with rage. He thought of his thwarted scheme for usury, his disappointed love, and he could not banish from his thoughts the pale and glowing face of Madeleine, who, far from making him forget the virginal purity of Antonine’s beauty, seemed

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to recall her more forcibly to his memory,— the two perfect, yet dissimilar, types heightening the charms of each by contrast.

“ Man is a strange animal. I feel within me all the instincts of the tiger,” said Pascal to himself, as he slowly walked down the street of the Faubourg St. Honoré, with both hands plunged in the pockets of his trousers. “ No,” added he, continuing to walk with his head down, and his eyes fixed mechanically on the pavement, “ it is not necessary to say that for fear of rendering the envy they bear us millionaires less cruel, less bitter to those who feel it, because, fortunately, those who envy us suffer the torments of the damned for every joy they suppose we have. Yet, indeed, it is a fact,— here I am at this hour, with a purse which can provide me with every pleasure permitted or forbidden that ever a man was allowed to dream! I am still young, I am not a fool, I am full of strength and health, free as a bird, the earth is open to me. I can obtain the most exquisite of all the country offers. I can lead the life of a sybarite in Paris, London, Vienna, Naples, or Constantinople; I can be a prince, duke, or marquis, and covered with insignia; I can have this evening the most beautiful and coveted actresses in Paris; I can have every day a feast of Lucullus, and have myself drawn by the finest horses in Paris; I could even in one month, by taking a splendid hôtel, as many knaves and imbeciles do, surround myself with the élite of Paris and of Europe,— even this so-called king, whom I failed to consecrate with the holy vial of the Bank of France, this archduke whom I have just left, has licked my feet. Ah, well, my word of honour!” added M. Pascal, mentally, gnashing his teeth, “ I wager there is not a person in the world who suffers as I do this moment. I was in paradise when, as a drudge, I cleaned the shoes of my old rascal usurer in the province. Fortunately, not to masticate empty, I can always, while waiting for better

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morsels, chew a little on Dutertre. Let us run to the house of my bailiff."

The archduke, after the departure of the financier, hastened, as we have said, to find the Marquise de Miranda, but, to his great astonishment, she was not in the next room.

As this chamber had no other egress than through the study, the prince asked the officers if they had seen the person to whom he had given audience pass. They replied that the lady had come out of the parlour, and had left the palace a little while before the departure of M. Pascal.

Madeleine had really gone away, although it was her first intention to wait for the prince after the conclusion of his interview with M. Pascal.

This is why the marquise did not keep her first resolution.

She reentered the parlour, after having treated M. Pascal as he well deserved, when, looking into the garden by chance, she saw Frantz, who had asked the favour of a turn in the park, accompanied by Major Butler.

At the sight of Frantz, Madeleine stood petrified with astonishment. She recognised her blond archangel, the object of that ideal and only passion which she had confessed to Sophie Dutertre.

CHAPTER XIX.

MADELEINE did not doubt that the hero of the duel of which she had been an invisible witness, her blond archangel, and the ideal of her passion, Frantz, and the lover of Antonine, were one and the same person.

At this sudden discovery the marquise felt a profound agitation. Until then, this love, surrounded with the mystery of the unknown, this vague and charming love which seemed like the memory of a sweet dream, had sufficed to fill her heart in the midst of the perturbations of her life, rendered so fantastic by the calm of her own indifference and the foolish transport that she involuntarily inspired in others.

It had never occurred to Madeleine that her ideal could be in love with another woman, or, rather, her thought had never rested on this doubt; for her, this radiant archangel was provided with beautiful wings, which might carry him away before all eyes into the infinite plains of ether. Incessantly besieged by lovers, by no means platonic, she experienced a joy, an ineffable moral repose, in lifting herself into immaterial regions, where her charmed and dazzled eyes saw her ideal hovering. But suddenly reality cut the wings of the archangel, and, fallen from his celestial sphere, he was no more than a handsome young man, in love with a pretty girl of fifteen, who adored him.

At this discovery, Madeleine could not repress a sort of sadness, or, rather, of sweet melancholy like that which follows the awakening from an enchanted dream, for to experience the tortures of jealousy, would be to

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love carnally. In short, if Frantz had almost always occupied the thought of Madeleine, he had never had part in her life; it only concerned her, then, to break the thousand ties that habit, sympathy, and confidence had rendered so dear. Nevertheless, she felt herself a prey to a growing disquietude, to painful presentiments which she could not explain to herself. Suddenly she started, and said :

“ If fate should order that this strange charm that I exercise on almost all who approach me should also act upon Frantz, if I, too, should share his feeling on seeing the only man who has ever occupied my heart and my thought ! ”

Then, trying to reassure herself by an appeal to her humility, Madeleine said :

“ No, no ; Frantz loves Antonine too much, it is his first love ; the purity, the sincerity of this love will protect him. He will have for me that coldness which I have for all. Yes, and who can say that my pride, my self-esteem will not revolt from the coldness of Frantz ? Who can tell me that, forgetting the duties of sacred friendship, almost maternal, toward Antonine, I may not employ all the resources of my mind and all my power of seduction to conquer Frantz ? Oh, no, that would be odious, and then I deceive myself again, Frantz loves Antonine too much. Alas ! the husband of Sophie loves her tenderly, too, and I fear that — ”

These reflections of the marquise were interrupted by the sound of the archduke’s voice as he ordered Pascal to go out; listening to this discussion, she said to herself :

“ After he has put this man out, the prince will come in here. I must attend to what is most urgent.”

Drawing a memorandum-book from her pocket, the marquise detached one of the leaflets, wrote a few lines with a pencil, folded the paper, and closed it firmly by means of a pin. After writing the address, “ For the

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prince," she laid the note where it could be seen on a marble table in the middle of the parlour, put on her hat, and went out, as we have said, a little before the departure of M. Pascal.

While the archduke, astonished and disappointed not to find the marquise, was opening with inexpressible anguish the note she had left, she was on her way to the home of Antonine, where Sophie Dutertre was also expected.

Upon her arrival at the house of President Hubert, introduced in a modest parlour, the marquise was received by Sophie Dutertre, who, running to her, asked, anxiously :

"Ah, well, Madeleine, have you seen the prince?"

"Yes, and I have good hope."

"Will it be possible?"

"Possible; yes, my dear Sophie, but that is all. I do not wish to excite foolish hope in the heart of this poor child. Where is she?"

"With her uncle. Happily, the crisis of this morning appeared to leave results more and more satisfactory. The physician has just said that, if the present condition continues, M. Hubert will perhaps be out of danger this evening."

"Tell me, Sophie, do you think M. Hubert is in a state to receive a visitor?"

"From whom?"

"From a certain person. I cannot tell you more now."

"I think so; because one of his friends has just seen him. Only the physician advised him not to stay too long, as the invalid might become fatigued."

"That suits marvellously. And poor little Antonine! She must be in mortal uneasiness."

"Poor dear child! She is to be pitied. It is such an innocent sorrow, and at the same time so desperate, that my own heart is almost broken. Indeed, Madeleine, I

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am sure she will die of grief if she must give up Frantz. Ah, death is preferable to some kinds of suffering," added Sophie, with an accent so profoundly sad that the tears rose to her eyes; then, drying them, she added, "Yes, but when one has children, one must live."

Madeleine was so impressed by the tone of Madame Dutertre, by her pallor that she had not observed before, and by the tears that she saw her shed, that she said to her:

"My God! Sophie, what is the matter, pray? Why these painful words? Why these tears? Yesterday I left you calm and happy, except, as you told me, the concern occasioned by your husband's business. Is there anything new to-day?"

"No, I — think — not," replied Sophie Dutertre, with hesitation. "But since yesterday — my husband's business concerns me less than —"

"Go on."

"No, no; I am foolish," replied Madame Dutertre, restraining herself, and seeming to hold back some words ready to escape; "but let us not talk of me, let us talk of Antonine; I am so touched by the despair of this poor child that one might say her suffering is mine."

"Sophie, you are not telling me the truth."

"I assure you."

"I see you are pale and changed. Yes, since yesterday you have suffered, and suffered much, I am sure."

"No," replied the young woman, putting her handkerchief to her eyes, "you are mistaken."

"Sophie," said Madeleine, quickly taking her friend's hands in her own, "you do not know how much your lack of confidence distresses me; you will make me think you have some complaint against me."

"What are you saying?" cried Sophie, pained by this suspicion, "you are and you will always be my best friend, and I am only afraid of fatiguing you with my grievances."

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"Ah, again?" replied the marquise, in a tone of affectionate reproach.

"Forgive me, forgive me, Madeleine; but really, is it not enough to confide to your friends your real sorrows, without saddening them by the confession of vague apprehensions, which are, nevertheless, very distressing?"

"My dear Sophie, tell me these apprehensions."

"Since yesterday,—but, again, I say no, no, I shall appear too foolish to you."

"You appear foolish to me, well, what of it? Speak, I beseech you."

"Ah, well, it seems to me that since yesterday my husband is under the influence of some idea which completely absorbs him."

"Business matters, perhaps?"

"No, oh, no; it is something else, and that is what confounds and alarms me."

"What have you observed?"

"Yesterday, after your departure, it had been agreed that he would undertake two measures of great importance to us. Seeing the hour slip away I went into our chamber, where he had gone to dress himself. I found him with his working apparel on, seated before a table, his head leaning on his hand; he had not heard me enter. 'Charles,' said I to him, 'you forget the hour. You are to go out, you know.' 'Why am I to go out?' he asked. 'My God! why, on urgent business,' and I recalled to his mind the two matters requiring his immediate attention. 'You are right,' said he, 'I had not thought of them again.' 'But what are you thinking of, Charles,' I asked. He blushed, appeared embarrassed, and did not answer a word."

"Perhaps he has some project, some plan he is meditating, that he thinks he ought not to confide to you yet."

"That is possible; yet he has never hidden anything from me, even his most undeveloped plans. No, no,

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it is not business affairs which absorb him, because yesterday, instead of talking with his father and me of the state of things, which I confess to you, Madeleine, is graver than I thought, or than I told you, Charles talked of things altogether irrelevant to the subject which concerned us so deeply. And then I did not have the courage to blame him, because he talked to us especially of you."

"Of me? And what did he say?"

"That you had been so full of kindness to him yesterday morning. Then he asked me a thousand little details about you, about your infancy and your life. I replied to him with pleasure, as you can well believe, Madeleine. Then suddenly he relapsed into a gloomy silence,—into a sort of meditation so deep that nothing could draw him out of it, not even the caresses of our children."

At this moment the old servant of M. Hubert entered, with a surprised and busy air, and said to Sophie:

"Madame, Mlle. Antonine is with her uncle, no doubt?"

"Yes, Peter; what is the matter?"

"My God, madame! it has astonished me so that I do not know what to answer."

"What is it, Peter? Explain yourself."

"Well, madame, it is this. There is a strange officer there; probably one belonging to the prince who now occupies the Élysée."

"Well?"

"This officer has a letter which he wishes to deliver himself, he says, into the hands of President Hubert, who must give an answer. I tried in vain to make this officer understand that monsieur was very sick. He assured me that it concerned a very important and very urgent matter, and that he came from his Highness who occupies the Élysée. Then, madame, in my embarrassment I have come to you to ask what I must do."

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Madame Dutertre, forgetting her grievance, turned to Madeleine and said, quickly, with the greatest joy :

" Your hope has not been mistaken. This letter from the prince is, perhaps, his consent to this marriage. Poor Antonine, how happy she will be ! "

" We must not rejoice too soon, dear Sophie. Let us wait. But do you go and see this officer, who is no doubt an aid of the prince. Tell him that M. Hubert, although a little better, is not able to receive him. Ask the officer to give you the letter, assuring him that you will deliver it at once to M. Hubert, who will send an answer."

" You are right, Madeleine. Come, Peter," said Sophie, going out of the room, accompanied by the old servant.

" I was not mistaken," said the marquise, when she was alone. " Those glances of M. Dutertre. Really it seems a fatality. But I hope," added she, smiling, " in Sophie's interest, and in her husband's, I shall be able to draw some good from this slight infidelity."

Then, reflecting a moment, Madeleine added :

" The prince is remarkably punctual. Is it possible that he has given such immediate attention to the advice contained in my note ! "

Antonine came out of her uncle's chamber. At the sight of the marquise the poor child did not dare take another step. She remained motionless, mute and trembling, waiting her fate with mortal agony, for Madeleine had promised that morning to intercede with the prince.

Sophie then entered, holding in her hand the letter which the aide-de-camp had just delivered. She gave it to Antonine, and said :

" Here, my child, carry this letter to your uncle immediately. It is very urgent, very important. He will give you an answer, and I will take it to the man who is waiting."

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Antonine took the letter from the hand of Madame Dutertre, throwing a look of anxious curiosity upon her two friends, who exchanged a hopeful, intelligent glance. Their expressions of countenance so impressed Antonine that, addressing the two young women in turn, she said to them :

“ Sophie, Madeleine, what is the matter ? You look at each other in silence, and what is this letter ? Pray, what has happened ? My God ! ”

“ Go quick, my child,” said Madeleine. “ You will find us here when you return.”

Antonine, more and more perplexed, ran precipitately to her uncle’s room. Madame Dutertre, seeing the marquise bend her head in silent thought, said to her :

“ Madeleine, now what is the matter with you ? ”

“ Nothing, my friend. I am thinking of the happiness of poor Antonine,—that is, if my hopes do not deceive me.”

“ Ah, her happiness she will owe to you ! With what enthusiastic delight she and Count Frantz will thank you ! Will you not have been their special providence ? ”

At the name of Frantz, Madeleine started, blushed slightly, and a cloud passed over her brow. Sophie had not time to perceive the emotion of her friend, as Antonine rushed suddenly out of the adjoining chamber, her charming face radiant with an expression of joy and surprise impossible to describe. Then, without uttering a word, she threw herself on Madeleine’s neck ; but her emotion was excessive ; she suddenly turned pale, and the two friends were obliged to support her.

“ God be praised ! ” said Sophie, “ for, in spite of your pallor and agitation, my poor Antonine, I am certain you have good news.”

“ Do not tremble so, dear child,” said Madeleine, in her turn. “ Recover yourself ! Calm yourself ! ”

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“Oh, if you only knew!” murmured the young girl.
“No, no, I cannot believe it yet.”

The Marquise de Miranda, taking Antonine’s hands affectionately in her own, said to her:

“You must always believe in happiness, my child. But come now, explain what you mean.”

“Just now,” the young girl went on to say, with a voice broken by tears of joy, “I carried the letter to my uncle. He said to me: ‘Antonine, my sight is very weak; read this letter to me, please.’ Then I broke the seal of the envelope; I did not know why my heart beat with such violence, but it palpitated so I felt sick. Wait, it is beating now,” added the young girl, putting her hand on her side, as if she would restrain the rapid pulsations which interrupted her narrative. Then she continued:

“I then read the letter; there was— Oh, I have not forgotten a single word of it.

“‘MONSIEUR PRESIDENT HUBERT:—I pray you, notwithstanding your condition of illness, to grant me at once, if it is possible, a moment of conversation upon a most urgent and important subject.

“Your affectionate,

“‘LEOPOLD MAXIMILIAN.’

“‘But,’ said my uncle, sitting up in bed, ‘this is the name of the prince who now occupies the Élysée, is it not?’ ‘I—I—think—it is, uncle,’ I replied. ‘What can he wish with me?’ asked my uncle. ‘I do not know,’ said I, trembling and blushing, because I was telling a falsehood, and I reproached myself for not daring to confess my love for Frantz. Then my uncle said, ‘It is impossible for me, although I am suffering, to refuse to receive the prince, but I cannot reply to his letter, I am too feeble. Take my place, Antonine, and write this,—recollect it well:

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“ ‘ MONSIEUR : — My weak condition does not permit me to have the honour of replying to your Highness with my own hand, and I ask another to say to you, monseigneur, that I am at your service.’

“ I am going to write this letter now for my uncle,” said Antonine, approaching a desk in the parlour. “ But, say, Sophie,” added the young girl, impulsively, “ ought I not to bless Madeleine and thank her on both knees ? For if the prince intended to oppose my marriage with Frantz, he would not come to see my uncle,— do you think he would, Sophie ? And but for Madeleine, the prince would never have consented to come, would he ?”

“ Like you, my child, I say that we ought to bless our dear Madeleine,” replied Madame Dutertre, pressing the hand of the marquise. “ But really, I repeat it again and again, Madeleine, you have a talisman for getting all you want.”

“ Alas, dear Sophie ! ” replied the marquise, smiling, “ this talisman, if indeed I have one, only serves others ; not myself.”

While the two friends conversed Antonine had seated herself at the desk, but, at the end of a few moments’ vain effort, she was obliged to give up writing ; her little hand trembled so violently that she could not hold her pen.

“ Let me take your place, my dear child,” said Madeleine, who had not taken her eyes off the young girl. “ I will write for you.”

“ Excuse me, Madeleine,” said Antonine, yielding her place to the marquise. “ It is not my fault, this excitement is too much for me.”

“ It is the fault of your heart, poor little thing. I understand your emotion,” writing President Hubert’s reply with a firm hand. “ Now,” added she, “ ring for some one, Antonine, so that this letter can be delivered to the officer of the prince without delay.”

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The old servant entered, and was instructed to deliver the letter to the officer.

"Now, my little Antonine," said the marquise to the young girl, "there remains one duty to be fulfilled, and I am certain that Sophie will be of my opinion; before the arrival of the prince, you must confess all to your uncle."

"What Madeleine says is very right," replied Sophie. "It would have a bad effect if your uncle should not be prepared for the probable intention of the visit of the prince."

"Your uncle is very kind and considerate, my dear Antonine," added Madeline, "and he will forgive a lack of confidence, caused principally, I do not doubt, by your timidity."

"You are right, both of you, I know it," said Antonine, "and, besides, I ought not to blush at this confession, for, my God, I loved Frantz without thinking of it, and in spite of myself."

"That is why you should hasten to confide in your uncle, my child, for the prince will not delay his visit. But tell me," added the marquise, "because, for reasons of my own, I do not wish to be found here when the prince arrives, can I not enter your chamber from this parlour?"

"The corridor into which this door opens," replied Antonine, "leads to my chamber; Sophie knows the way."

"Certainly, I will conduct you, Madeleine," replied Sophie, rising with the marquise, who, kissing Antonine tenderly on the forehead, said to her as she pointed to the door of her uncle's chamber, "Go quick, my dear little one, the moments are precious."

The young girl threw a glance of affectionate gratitude on the two friends, who, leaving the parlour, followed the corridor on their way to Antonine's chamber, when they saw the old servant coming.

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He approached and said to Sophie :

“ Madame, M. Dutertre wishes to speak to you this moment.”

“ My husband ! where is he ?”

“ Below, madame, in a carriage at the door ; he told the porter to order me to ask you to come down without delay.”

“ That is strange ! Why did he not come up ?” said Sophie, looking at her friend.

“ M. Dutertre has something to say to you, madame,” said Peter.

Madame Dutertre, not a little disquieted, followed him, as she said to the marquise,—

“ I shall return immediately, my friend, for I am eager to know the result of the prince’s visit to M. Hubert.”

Madeleine was left alone.

“ I did well to hurry,” thought she, with a sort of bitterness. “ I did well to yield to my first instinct of generosity ; to-morrow it would have been too late. I would not, perhaps, have had the courage to sacrifice myself to Antonine. How strange it is ! An hour ago, in thinking of Frantz and her, I had not a feeling of jealousy or pain, and only a sweet melancholy, but now by degrees my heart is contracted and filled with sorrow, and this moment I suffer — oh, yes, how I suffer !”

The abrupt entrance of Sophie interrupted the reflections of the marquise, and she guessed that some great misfortune had happened by the frightened, almost wild, expression of Madame Dutertre, who said to her, in a short, panting voice :

“ Madeleine, you have offered me aid, and now I accept it !”

“ Great God ! Sophie, what is the matter ?”

“ Our condition is desperate.”

“ Do explain.”

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“To-morrow, this evening, perhaps, Charles will be arrested.”

“Your husband?”

“Arrested, I say; oh, my God!”

“But what for? What is it?”

“That monster of wickedness, whom we thought our benefactor, M. Pascal, has —”

“M. Pascal!”

“Yes, yesterday — I did not dare — I have not told you all, but —”

“M. Pascal!” interrupted Madeleine.

“Our fate is in the hands of that pitiless man; he can, and he wishes to reduce us to the last degree of misery. My God! what will become of us? What will become of our children and the father of my husband? What will become of us all? Oh, it is horrible! It is horrible!”

“M. Pascal!” said the marquise, with restrained indignation, “the wretch! Oh, yes, I read it in his face; I have seen his insolence and meanness — such a man would be without pity.”

“You are acquainted with him?”

“This morning I met him at the palace with the prince. Ah, now I regret having yielded to the anger, the contempt, which this man inspired in me. Why did you not tell me sooner? It is a great misfortune that you did not, Sophie, a great misfortune.”

“What do you mean?”

“Oh, no matter. There is no use in going back to the past. But let us see, Sophie, my friend, do not allow yourself to despond, exaggerate nothing and tell me all, and we will find some way of escaping the blow which threatens you.”

“It is impossible; all that I come to ask in the name of Charles, in the name of my children, is that —”

“Let me interrupt you. Why do you say it is impossible to prevent this disaster?”

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“ M. Pascal is relentless.”

“ That may be, but what is your position toward him ? ”

“ A year ago my husband found himself, like so many other manufacturers, in an embarrassed position. M. Pascal offered his services to us. Charles, deceived by fair appearances, accepted. It would be too long to explain to you by what a train of affairs Charles, trusting the promises of M. Pascal, soon discovered that he was absolutely dependent on this man, who could any day recall more than a hundred thousand crowns,—that is to say, could ruin our business and plunge us in misery. At last that day has come, and M. Pascal, strong in this terrible power, places my husband and myself in the alternative of submitting to this ruin or consenting to two unworthy deeds he imposes upon us.”

“ The wretch ! The infamous wretch ! ”

“ Yesterday, when you arrived, he had just made known to us his intentions. We answered according to our hearts and our honour ; he swore to revenge himself on us and to-day he has kept his word. We are lost, I tell you ; he claims, too, that by reason of some authority, he will put Charles in prison temporarily. My idea, above everything else, is to save my husband from prison, but he refuses to escape, saying it is only a decoy, that he has nothing to fear, and that he — ”

Madeleine, who had remained silent and thoughtful for some time, again interrupted her friend, and said to her :

“ What would be necessary to free you from all fear of M. Pascal ? ”

“ To reimburse him.”

“ And what does your husband owe him ? ”

“ More than a hundred thousand crowns, our factory as security, but once deprived of our property we would possess nothing in the world. My husband would be declared a bankrupt, and our future would be hopeless.”

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“ And is there absolutely no other way of escaping M. Pascal than by immediate repayment ? ”

“ There is one on which my husband had always relied, resting on the word of this wicked man.”

“ And what is that way ? ”

“ To give Charles ten years to pay off the debt.”

“ And suppose you had that assurance ? ”

“ Alas ! we would be saved, but M. Pascal wishes to have his revenge, and he will never consent to give us any means of salvation.”

This sad conversation was interrupted by Antonine, who, beaming with joy, ran into the room, saying :

“ Oh, Madeleine ! come ! come ! ”

“ What is it, my child ? Some happy news, I know it by your radiant countenance.”

“ Ah, dear friends,” said the young girl, “ all my fear is that I will not be able to bear so much happiness ! My uncle and the prince consent to all, and the prince,—oh, he was so kind, so fatherly to me, for he wanted me to take part in his conversation with my uncle, and he even asked my pardon for the grief he had caused me in opposing our marriage. ‘ My only excuse,’ said he, with the greatest tenderness, ‘ is, Mlle. Antonine, that I did not know you. Madame Marquise de Miranda began my conversion, and you have finished it, and since she is here, you say, have the goodness to let her know that I would like to thank her before you for having put me in the way of repairing the wrong I have done you.’ Were not those noble, touching words ! ” added the young girl. “ Oh, come, Madeleine, come, my benefactress, my sister, my mother, you to whom Frantz and I will owe our happiness. And you come too, Sophie,” added Antonine, taking Madame Dutertre by the hand, “ are you not also a sharer in my happiness as you have been in my confidence and my despair ? ”

“ My dear child,” said Madame Dutertre, trying to disguise her trouble, “ I need not tell you that I share

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your joy ; but the presence of the prince would embarrass me, and besides, as I was telling Madeleine just now, I must return home. I cannot leave my children alone too long. Come, embrace me, Antonine, your happiness is assured ; that thought will be sweet to me, and if I have some sorrow, believe me, it will help me to bear it. Good-bye. If you have anything new to tell me, come to see me to-morrow morning."

" Sophie," said the marquise, in a low but firm voice to her friend, " courage and hope ! Do not let your husband go away ; wait for me at your house to-morrow, all the morning."

" What do you mean ? "

" I cannot explain more, only let Antonine's experience give you a little confidence. This morning she was in despair, now you see her radiant with happiness."

" Yes, thanks to you."

" Come, now, embrace me once more ; courage and hope."

Then, approaching Antonine, Madeleine said to her :

" Now, my child, go back to the prince."

The young girl and the marquise left Madame Dutertre, who, yielding in spite of herself to the conviction which seemed to ring from Madeleine's words, returned to her dwelling with a ray of hope. The prince waited for Madeleine in the parlour of President Hubert ; he saluted her respectfully, and said to her, with that ceremonious formality which Antonine's presence imposed :

" I had it in my heart, marquise, to thank you for the great service you have rendered me. You have put it in my power to appreciate Mlle. Hubert as she deserves to be ; the happiness of my godson Frantz is for ever assured. I have agreed with M. President Hubert, who willingly consents to it, that to-morrow morning the betrothal of Frantz and Mlle. Hubert will take place according to the German custom, that is to say, that I and President Hubert will sign, under penalty of perjury

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and infidelity, the contract of marriage which Frantz and mademoiselle will sign under the same conditions."

"Since you have said to Antonine, monseigneur, that I have put you in the way of truth, Antonine is under obligation to prove to you all the good that I have told you of her."

"I have a favour to ask of you, marquise," continued the prince, drawing from his pocket a letter and presenting it to Madeleine. "You are acquainted with the family of Colonel Pernetti?"

"Very well, monseigneur."

"Then do me the kindness to have this letter delivered to the colonel, after you have taken knowledge of its contents. I am certain," added the archduke, emphasising his last words, "that you will have as much pleasure in sending this letter as he to whom it is addressed will have pleasure in receiving it."

"I do not doubt it, monseigneur, and I here renew my very sincere thanks," said the marquise, making a ceremonious curtsey.

"To-morrow, Mlle. Antonine," said the prince to the young girl, "I am going to break the good news very gently to my poor Frantz, for fear he may be overcome by his emotion; but I am certain when he knows all he, like you, will forgive me for the grief I have caused him."

And, after having again formally saluted Antonine and the marquise, with whom he exchanged a look of intelligence, the prince returned to the *Élysée-Bourbon*.

The next day at ten o'clock Madeleine entered a carriage, and was conducted first to the office of a notary, and then to the house of M. Pascal.

CHAPTER XX.

M. PASCAL lived alone on the ground floor of a house situated in the new quarter St. Georges, and opening on the street. A private entrance was reserved for the counting-room of the financier, which was managed by a confidential clerk, assisted by a young deputy who attended to the writing. Here M. Pascal continued to make very valuable discounts.

The principal entrance of his dwelling, preceded by a vestibule, led to an antechamber and other rooms. This apartment, without any luxury, was, nevertheless, comfortable; a valet for the interior and a lad of fifteen years for errands sufficed for the service of M. Pascal, a man who never compensated for his immense wealth by abundant expenditure, or indulgence in those luxuries which support labour and art.

This morning, at half-past nine, M. Pascal, dressed in his morning gown, was walking up and down the floor of his office with great agitation; his night had been one of long and feverish sleeplessness. A well-paid spy, employed for two days to observe what was taking place in the home of Mlle. Antonine, had reported to M. Pascal the visit of the prince to President Hubert.

This prompt and significant step left no doubt in the mind of the financier concerning his own plans in connection with the young girl; this cruel disappointment was complicated with other resentments: first, rage at the recognition of the truth that, notwithstanding his millions, his will, obstinate as it was, was obliged to submit before impossibilities, all the more painful because

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he had believed himself at the very door of success. That was not all. If he had no love for Antonine, in the noblest acceptation of the word, he did feel for this child, so lovely and charming, an ardent passion, ephemeral, perhaps, but of extreme intensity as long as it lasted ; and so, with a sort of ferocious egotism, he reasoned with himself :

“ I would like to possess that little girl at any price. I will marry her if I must, and when I am tired of her an annuity of twelve or fifteen thousand francs will rid me of her. I am rich enough to gratify myself in that caprice.”

All this, however detestable, was, from the standpoint of society as it existed, perfectly possible and legal, and it was, we repeat, that possibility which rendered his want of success so bitter to M. Pascal. Another thing still : what he felt for Antonine being, after all, only a sensual desire, did not tolerate the exclusive preference of pure love ; so that, in his passionate longing for this young girl of innocent and virginal beauty, he had not been less strongly impressed by the provoking charms of Madeleine, and, by a refinement of sensuality which aggravated his torture, M. Pascal had all night evoked, by his inflamed imagination, the contrasting loveliness of these two beautiful creatures.

And at this hour in which we see him M. Pascal was a prey to the same torment.

“ Curses on me ! ” said he, promenading with a feverish and unequal step. “ Why did I ever see that damned blonde woman with the black eyebrows, blue eyes, pale complexion, impudent face, and provoking figure ? She seems to me more attractive even than that little girl . hardly grown. Curses on me ! will these two faces always pursue me ? or, rather, will my disordered mind always evoke them ? Misery ! have I not been fool enough, brute enough ? I do not know how, but the thing was so easy, so practical, that is what makes me furious.

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Surely, rich as I am, I ought to be able to marry this little girl and have the other for a mistress, because I do not doubt she is the mistress of that archduke, confound him ! and I defy him to give her as much money as I would have given her. Yes, yes," continued he, clenching his fists in excess of rage, "I am becoming a fool, a furious fool, but I did not ask to have the Empress of Russia for a mistress, or to marry the daughter of the Queen of England or any other queen. What did I wish ? To marry a little citizen, niece of an old magistrate who has not a cent. Are there not thousands of such marriages ? And I could not succeed ! and I have thirty millions ! Misery ! my fortune is to fine purpose, not to take away a mistress from this automaton German prince ! After all, she only loves him for his money. He is nearly forty ; he is as proud as a peacock, stupid as a goose, and cold as an icicle. I am younger than he, not any uglier, and if he is an archduke, am I not a millionaire ? And then I have the advantage of having put him at my feet, for this accursed and insolent woman heard me treat her imbecile prince as a poor creature ; she reproached him before me for enduring the humiliations I heaped upon him. She ought to despise that man, and, like all women of her kind, have a weakness for a rough and energetic man who put this crowned, lanky fellow at his feet. She treated me cruelly before him, that is true, but it was to flatter him ; we all understand those profligates. Oh, if I could only take this woman away from him, what a triumph ! what a revenge ! what a consolation for my lost marriage ! Consolation ? No ; for one of these women could not make me forget the other. I do not know if it is my age, but I have never known such tenacity of desire as I feel for this little girl. But no matter, if I could only take his mistress away from this prince, half of my will would be accomplished ; and who knows ? This woman is acquainted with Antonine ; she

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seems to have influence over her. Yes, who knows, if once mine, I would not be able by means of money to decide her to— Misery!" cried Pascal, with an explosion of ferocious joy, "what a triumph, to take a wife from this blond youth, and his beautiful mistress from the archduke! If my fortune can do it, it shall be done!"

And our hero, holding up his head, seemed to develop into an attitude of imperious will, while his features took on an expression of satanic joy.

"Come, come," said he, holding his head high; "if I have talked like a fool and an ingrate, money is a beautiful thing." Then stopping to reflect awhile he continued:

"Let us see now,—calmness by all means,—we will undertake the thing well and slowly. My spy will know this evening where the archduke's mistress lives, at least if she lives in the palace, which is not probable. Let me find out where she lives," added he, stroking his chin with a meditative air. "Zounds, I will send to her that old milliner, Madame Doucet. It is the old way and always the best with these actresses and such women, for, after all, the mistress of a prince is no better. She came, her head uncovered, to throw herself unceremoniously into our conversation; she had no discretion to protect. So I cannot have a better go-between, a more suitable one, than old Mother Doucet. I will write to her at once."

M. Pascal was occupied in writing at his desk when his valet entered.

"What is it?" asked the financier, abruptly. "I did not ring."

"Monsieur, it is a lady."

"I have no time."

"She has come for a letter of credit."

"Let her go to the counting-room."

"This lady wishes to speak to M. Pascal."

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“ Impossible. Let her go to the counting-room.”
The valet went out.

Pascal continued to write, but at the end of a few moments the servant returned.

“ When will you finish? What is it now?”

“ Monsieur, this lady who —”

“ Ah, so you are making a jest, are you? I told you to send her to the counting-room!”

“ This lady has given me a card and asked me to tell monsieur to read what she has just written at the bottom.”

“ Well, hand it here. It is insupportable!” said Pascal taking the card, where he read the following :

“ *The Marquise de Miranda.*”

Below the name was written with a pencil :

“ She had the honour of meeting M. Pascal yesterday at the Élysée-Bourbon, with his Highness, the Archduke Leopold.”

If a thunderbolt had fallen at the feet of M. Pascal he could not have been more astonished. He could not believe his eyes, and read the card a second time soliloquising :

“ The Marquise de Miranda! She is a marquise, then? Bah! she is a marquise as Lola Montès is a countess — petticoat nobility; but at any rate it is she. She here! in my house at the very moment I was taxing my wits to contrive a meeting with her. Ah, Pascal, my friend Pascal, your star of gold, for a moment hidden, shines at last in all its brilliancy. And she comes here under the pretext of a letter of credit. Come, come, Pascal, my friend, keep calm; one does not find such an opportunity twice in his life. Think now, if you are sly, you can take the mistress of the prince and the wife of the

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blond youth in the same net. Ah, how my heart beats! I am sure I must look pale."

"Monsieur, what shall I answer this lady?" asked the valet, astonished at the prolonged silence of his master.

"One minute, you rascal; wait my orders," replied Pascal, abruptly. "Come, keep calm, keep calm," thought he to himself. "Excitement now would lose all, would paralyse my plans. It is a terrible part to play, but having such a fine game at hand, I believe I would blow my brains out with rage if, through awkwardness now, I should lose it."

After another silence, during which he succeeded in mastering his agitation, he said to himself:

"I am calm now. Let her come, I can play a sure game." Then he said aloud to his valet:

"Show the lady in."

The servant went out and soon returned to open the door and announce, "Madame the Marquise de Miranda."

Madeleine, contrary to her custom, was dressed, as she had said to the prince, no longer like a grandmother, but with a dainty elegance which rendered her beauty still more irresistible. A Pamela hat of rice straw, ornamented with ears of corn mingled with corn-flowers, relieved and revealed her face and neck; a new gown of white muslin, also strewn with corn-flowers, delineated the outlines of her incomparable figure, the finished type of refined elegance, the voluptuous flexibility characteristic of Mexican creoles, while her gauze scarf rose and fell in gentle undulations with the tranquil breathing of her marble bosom.

CHAPTER XXI.

PASCAL stood a moment dazzled, fascinated.

He beheld Madeleine a thousand times more beautiful, more attractive, more interesting than the day before. And, although a fine judge, as he had said to the prince, although he had enjoyed and abused all those treasures of beauty, grace, and youth which misery renders tributary to wealth, never in his life had he dreamed of such a creature as Madeleine ; and strange, or rather natural to this brutalised man, deprived by satiety of all pleasures, he evoked the same moment the virginal figure of Antonine by the side of the marquise. For him, Venus Aphrodite was perfected by Hebe.

Madeleine, taking advantage of the involuntary silence of Pascal, said in a dry, haughty tone, and without making the slightest allusion to the scene of the day before, notwithstanding the words added to her name on the card :

“ Monsieur, I have a letter of credit on you : here it is. I wished to see you in order to arrange some business matters.”

This short and disdainful accent disconcerted Pascal ; he expected some explanation of the scene of the day before, if not an excuse for it, so he said, stammering :

“ What, madame, you come here — only — to learn about this letter of credit ? ”

“ For this letter first, then for something else.”

“ I suspected it,” said Pascal to himself, with a light sigh of relief, “ this letter of credit was only a pretext. It is a good sign.”

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Then he said aloud :

“ The letter of credit, madame, is in the hands of my cashier ; he has the order to attend to your demand. As to the other thing which brings you, is it, as I hope, personal ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Before speaking, madame, permit me to ask you one question.”

“ What is it ? ”

“ On the card which you have just sent me, madame, you wrote that you had seen me yesterday at the Elysée.”

“ Well ? ”

“ But you do not seem to recollect our interview.”

“ I do not comprehend.”

“ Well,” said Pascal, regaining his assurance and thinking that the dryness of Madeleine’s tone was assumed for some purpose he did not clearly understand, “ let us now, madame marquise, confess, at least, that you treated your humble servant very cruelly yesterday.”

“ What next ? ”

“ What ! you feel no remorse for having been so wicked ? You do not regret your unjust anger against me ? ”

“ No.”

“ Very well, I understand ; it was done for effect on this fine man, the archduke,” Pascal presumed to say with a smile, hoping in some way to draw Madeleine out of this frozen reserve which had begun to make him uneasy. “ It is always very adroit to pretend to feel an interest in the dignity of those we govern, because, between us,—beautiful, adorable, as you are,—you can make of this poor prince all that you wish, but I defy you ever to do so with a man of spirit or a brave man.”

“ Continue.”

“ Wait, madame marquise, I have not seen your letter of credit,” and Pascal opened it. “ I wager it is an

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atrocious meanness. Zounds ! I was sure of it,—forty thousand francs ! What would make a woman like you do with such a beggarly pittance in Paris ? Ah ! Ah ! Oh ! —forty thousand francs. Only a German archduke could be capable of such magnificence."

Madeleine had at first listened to Pascal without comprehending him. Soon she saw his meaning : he regarded her as the mistress of the prince and living on his liberality.

A deep blush mounted suddenly to Madeleine's face. Then a moment of reflection calmed her, and for the sake of her projects she permitted Pascal to keep his opinion, and replied, with a half-smile :

"Evidently you do not like the prince."

"I detest him !" cried Pascal, audaciously, encouraged by the smile of the marquise, and thinking to make a master stroke by braving things out. "I abominate this accursed prince, because he possesses an inestimable treasure—that I would like to take away from him even at the cost of all my —"

And Pascal threw an impassioned look on Madeleine, who replied :

"A treasure ? I did not think the prince so rich, since he desired to borrow from you, monsieur."

"Eh, madame," said Pascal, in a low, panting voice, "that treasure is you."

"Come, you flatter me, monsieur."

"Listen, madame," replied Pascal, after a moment's silence, "let us come to the point, that is the best method. You are a woman of mind, I am not a fool, we understand each other."

"About what, monsieur ?"

"I am going to tell you. If among foreigners I do not pass for a schoolgirl in finances, I am supposed to have a little competency, am I not ?"

"You are known to be immensely rich, monsieur."

"I pass then for what I am ; I am going to prove it

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to you ; a million of ready money for the expenses of the establishment, a hundred thousand pounds annuity, a wedding basket, such as the united archdukes of Germany could not pay for with all their little savings, and more, I pay for the house. What do you say to that ? ”

Madeleine, who did not comprehend him at first, looked at Pascal with an air of astonishment. He continued :

“ This liberality amazes you, or perhaps you do not believe it. It appears to you to be too much, does it ? I will show you I can indulge myself in that folly. Here is a little note-book which looks like nothing,” and he drew it from one of the drawers of his desk. “ It is my balance-sheet, and, without understanding finances, you can see that this year my income amounted to twenty-seven millions, five hundred and sixty thousand francs. Now let us suppose that my extravagance costs me the round sum of three millions, there remain twenty-four little millions, which, manipulated as I manipulate them, will bring me in fifteen hundred thousand pounds income, and, as I live admirably well on fifty or sixty thousand francs a year, I gain in three years, with my income alone, the three millions which my folly cost me. I tell you that, marquise, because in these adventures it is well to estimate and prove that one can do all he promises. Now confess that the good man Pascal is worth more than an archduke.”

“ So you make this offer to me, monsieur ? ”

“ What a question ! Come, leave your archduke, give me some promise, and I put in your hand a million in drafts. I will make an act with my notary for the hundred thousand pounds annuity, and if Father Pascal is satisfied, he is not at the end of his rolls.”

The financier spoke the truth ; he had made these offers sincerely. The increasing admiration he felt at the sight of Madeleine, the pride of taking the mistress of a prince, the vanity of surrounding her, before the eyes of all Paris, with a splendour which would excite

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the envy of all,—finally, the abominable hope of inducing the marquise, by means of money, to take Antonine away from Frantz,—all, in his ignominy and in his magnificence, justified his offer to Madeleine.

Recognising from this offer the degree of influence she exercised over Pascal, Madeleine rejoiced in it, and, to obtain further proof of his sincerity, she said, with apparent hesitation :

“Without doubt, monsieur, these propositions are above my poor merit, but —”

“Fifty thousand pounds more annuity, and a charming country-house,” cried Pascal. “That is my last word, marquise.”

“And this is mine, M. Pascal,” said Madeleine; rising and giving the financier a look which made him recoil.

“Listen to me well. You are basely avaricious ; your magnificent offer proves, then, the impression I have made on you.”

“If this offer is not enough,” cried Pascal, clasping his hands, “speak, and —”

“Be silent, I have no need of your money.”

“My fortune, if necessary.”

“Look at me well, M. Pascal, and if you have ever dared look an honest woman in the face, and know how to read truth on her brow, you will see that I speak the truth. You might put all your fortune there at my feet, and the disdain and disgust you excite in me would be the same.”

“Crush me, but let me tell you —”

“Be silent! It has suited me to let you believe a moment that I was the mistress of the prince; first, because I do not care for the esteem of a man of your character, and then, because that would encourage you in your insulting offers.”

“But then, why have —”

“Be silent! I had need to know the degree of influ-

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ence I possessed over you. I know, and I am going to use it."

"Oh, I ask nothing better, if you wish — "

"I have come here for two reasons; the first, to receive this letter of credit — "

"Instantly, but — "

"I have come for another reason, — to put an end to the infamous abuse you have made of an apparent service, a pretended generosity rendered to the husband of my best friend, M. Charles Dutertre."

"You are acquainted with the Dutertres! ah, I see the trap."

"All means are fair to catch malicious creatures; you are caught."

"Oh, not yet," replied Pascal, gnashing his teeth with rage and despair, for the imperious beauty of Madeleine, increased by her glowing animation, excited his passion to frenzy; "perhaps you triumph too soon, madame."

"You will see."

"We will see," said Pascal, trying to pay off with audacity, in spite of the torture he endured, "we will see."

"This instant, there on that table, you are going to sign a deed, in good form, by which you engage yourself to grant to M. Dutertre the time that you have granted by your verbal promise, to liquidate his debt to you."

"But — "

"As you are capable of deceiving me, and as I understand nothing of business, I have ordered a notary to draw up this deed, so that you have only to sign it."

"This is a pleasantry!"

"The notary has accompanied me, he is waiting in the next room."

"What, have you brought a — "

"One does not come alone into the house of a man like you. You are going to sign this deed instantly."

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“ For what return ? ”

“ My disdain and contempt, as always.”

“ Misery ! that is violence ! ”

“ It is so.”

“ You wish to take from me, gratis, my sweetest morsel,—in the very moment when, in the rage which possesses me, no reparation but revenge was left to console me a little ! Ah, Madame Dutertre is your best friend ! Ah, her tears will be bitter to you ! Ah, the sorrows of this family will break your heart ! Zounds, that is to the point, and I will have my revenge besides ! ”

“ You refuse ? ”

“ If I refuse ? Ah, indeed, madame marquise, do you think me an idiot ? And for a woman of mind you have shown yourself very weak in this. You might have caught me by cajolery — entangled by some promise. I was capable of — ”

“ Come, now, who would stoop so low as to pretend to wish to seduce M. Pascal ? You are ordered to repair an injury, you make reparation, and M. Pascal is despised after as before, to-day as yesterday, and to-morrow as to-day.”

“ Misery ! this is enough to make one mad ! ” cried the financier, astonished, and almost frightened by the tone of conviction with which Madeleine spoke, and he asked himself if she had not discovered some secret rottenness in his life which she intended to use as a weapon. But our hero had been a prudent scoundrel, and soon took heart again after a rapid examination of conscience, and replied :

“ Ah, well, madame, here I am ready to obey when you force me to do so. I am waiting.”

“ It will not be long.”

“ I am waiting.”

“ I have seen in your street several lodgings to let. That is nothing extraordinary, I am sure, M. Pascal ; but a happy chance has shown me a very pretty apart-

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ment on the first floor, not yet engaged, almost opposite your house."

Pascal looked at Madeleine stupidly.

"This apartment I shall take, and shall install myself there to-morrow."

A vague foreboding made the financier start; he turned pale.

Madeleine continued, fixing her burning gaze on the man's eyes :

"At every hour of the day and the night you will know that I am there. You will not be able to go out of your house without passing before my windows, where I shall be often, very often. I am fond of sitting at the window. You will not leave your house, I defy you. An irresistible, fatal charm will draw you back to your punishment every instant. The sight of me will give you torture, and you will seek that sight. Every time you meet my glance, and you will meet it often, you will receive a dagger in your heart, and yet, ambushed behind your curtains, you will watch my every movement."

As she talked, Madeleine had made a step toward Pascal, holding him fascinated, panting under her fixed, burning eyes, from which he could not remove his own.

The marquise continued :

"That is not all. As this lodging is large, Antonine, immediately after her marriage, and Frantz will come to live with me. I do not know, then, my poor M. Pascal, what will become of you."

"Oh, this woman is infernal," murmured the financier.

"Judge, then, the tortures of all sorts that you will have to endure. You must have been deeply smitten with Antonine to wish to marry her; you must have been deeply smitten with me to put your fortune at my feet. Ah, well, not only will you suffer an agonising martyrdom in seeing the two women you have madly desired possessed by others,—for I am a widow and

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will remarry,—but you will curse your riches, for every moment of the day will tell you that they have been impotent, and that they will always be impotent to satisfy your ardent desires."

"Leave me!" stammered Pascal, recoiling before Madeleine, who kept him always under her eye. "Leave me! Truly this woman is a demon!"

"Stop, my poor M. Pascal," continued the marquise, "you see I pity you in spite of myself, when I think of your envious rage, your ferocious jealousy, exasperated to frenzy by the constant happiness of Antonine, for you will see us every day, and often in the night. Yes, the season is beautiful, the bright moon charming, and many times in the evening, very late, hidden in the shadow with your eyes fixed on our dwelling, you will see sometimes Antonine and sometimes me with our elbows on the balcony railing, enjoying the cool of the evening, and smiling often, I confess, at M. Pascal, then standing behind some window-blind or peeping from some casement, devouring us with his eyes; often Antonine and Frantz will talk of love by the light of the moon, often I and my future husband will be as delightfully occupied under your eyes."

"Curses!" cried Pascal, losing all control of himself, "she tortures me on burning coals."

"And that is not all," continued the marquise, in a low, almost panting, voice. "At a late hour of the night you will see our windows closed, our curtains discreetly drawn on the feeble light of our alabaster lamps, so sweet and propitious to the voluptuousness of the night." Then the marquise, bursting into peals of laughter, added: "And, my poor M. Pascal, I would not be astonished then if, in your rage and despair, you should become mad and blow your brains out."

"Not without having my revenge, at least," muttered Pascal, wrought to frenzy, and rushing to his desk where he had a loaded pistol.

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But Madeleine, who knew she had everything to fear from this man, had, as she slowly approached him, kept him under her eye, and, step by step, had reached the chimney ; at the threatening gesture of Pascal she pulled the bell-cord violently.

At the moment Pascal, livid and frightful, turned to face Madeleine, the servant entered hastily, surprised at the loud ringing of the bell.

At the sound of the opening door and the sight of his valet, Pascal came to himself, quickly thrust the hand which held the pistol behind him, and let it fall on the carpet.

The marquise had taken advantage of the interruption to approach the door left open by the servant, and to call in a loud voice to the notary, who, seated in the next room, had also quickly risen at the sudden sound of the bell :

“ Monsieur, a thousand pardons for having made you wait so long ; do me the favour to enter.”

The notary entered.

“ Go out,” said Pascal, roughly, to his servant.

And the financier wiped his livid brow, which was bathed in a cold sweat.

Madeleine, alone with Pascal and the notary, said to the latter :

“ You have, monsieur, prepared the deed relating to M. Charles Dutertre ?”

“ Yes, madame, there is nothing to do but to approve the document and sign.”

“ Very well,” said the marquise ; then, while Pascal, wholly overcome, was leaning on the armchair before his desk, she took a sheet of paper and a pen, and wrote what follows :

“ Sign the deed, and, not only will I not live opposite your house, but this evening I will leave Paris, and will not return in a long time. What I promise I will keep.”

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Having written these lines, she handed the paper to Pascal, and said to the notary :

"I beg your pardon, sir; it concerned a condition relating to the deed that I desire to submit to M. Pascal."

"Certainly, madame," replied the notary, while the financier was reading.

He had hardly concluded his examination of the note, when he said to the notary, in a changed voice, as if he were eager to escape a great danger :

"Let us — finish — this — deed."

"I am going, monsieur, to give you a reading of it before signing," replied the notary, drawing the deed from his pocketbook, and slowly unfolding it.

But M. Pascal snatched it rudely from his hands and said, as if his sight were overcast :

"Where must I sign ?"

"Here, monsieur, and approve the document first, but it is customary — "

Pascal wrote the approval of the document with a spasmotic and trembling hand, signed it, threw the pen on the desk, and inclined his head so as not to meet the glance of Madeleine.

"There is no flourish here," said the careful notary.

Pascal made the flourish ; the notary took the deed with a surprised, almost frightened look, so sinister and dreadful was the expression of Pascal's face.

The marquise, perfectly cool, took up her letter of credit lying on the desk, and said to the financier :

"As I will have need of all my funds for my journey, monsieur, and as I leave this evening, I am going, if you please, to receive the whole amount of this letter of credit."

"Pass to the counting-room," replied Pascal, mechanically, his eyes wandering and bloodshot ; his livid pallor had suddenly turned to a purplish red.

Madeleine preceding the notary, who made a pretext of saluting Pascal in order to look at him again, still

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with an air of alarm, went out of the office, shut the door, and said to the servant:

“Where is the counting-room, please?”

“The first door on the left in the court, madame.”

The marquise left the parlour when a loud noise was heard in the office of M. Pascal.

It sounded like the fall of a body on the floor.

The servant, leaving Madeleine and the notary at once, ran to his master’s room.

The marquise, after having received bank-bills to the amount of her letter of credit, was just about to enter her carriage, accompanied by the notary, when she saw the servant rush out of the gateway with a frightened air.

“What is the matter, my good friend?” asked the notary, “you seem to be alarmed.”

“Ah, monsieur, what a pity! my master has just had an attack of apoplexy. I am running for the physician.”

And he disappeared, running at the top of his speed.

“I thought,” said the notary, addressing Madeleine, “this dear gentleman did not appear to be in his natural condition. Did you not observe the same thing, madame marquise?”

“I thought, like you, there was something peculiar in the countenance of M. Pascal.”

“God grant this attack may be nothing serious, madame. So rich a man to die in the vigour of life, that would really be a pity!”

“A great pity indeed! But tell me, monsieur, if you wish, I can take you home in my carriage, and you can deliver to me the deed relating to M. Dutertre; I have need of it.”

“Here it is, madame, but I shall not permit you to drive out of your way for me. I am going only two or three steps from here.”

“Very well. Have the kindness, then, to take these

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forty thousand francs. I wish to have ten thousand for my journey and a letter of credit on Vienna."

"I will attend to it immediately, madame. And when will you need this money?"

"This evening before six o'clock, if you please."

"I will be on time, madame."

The notary bowed respectfully, and Madeleine ordered the coachman to drive directly to the factory of Charles Dutertre.

CHAPTER XXII.

MADELEINE, as we have said, on leaving the house of M. Pascal, went directly to the home of Madame Dutertre, who was alone in her bedchamber when the servant announced the marquise. Sophie, seated in an armchair, seemed a prey to overwhelming despair. At the sight of her friend, she raised her head quickly ; her sad face, bathed in tears, was of a deadly pallor.

"Take this, read it, and weep no longer," said Madeleine, tenderly, handing her the deed signed by M. Pascal. "Was I wrong to tell you yesterday to hope?"

"What is this paper?" asked Sophie Dutertre, in surprise, "explain it."

"Yours and your husband's deliverance —"

"Our deliverance?"

"M. Pascal has pledged himself to give your husband all the time needed to pay the debt."

"Can it be true! No, no, such a happiness — Oh, it is impossible!"

"Read, then, and see for yourself, unbeliever."

Sophie rapidly looked over the deed ; then, staring at the marquise, she exclaimed :

"That seems like a miracle ; I cannot believe my eyes. And how was it done? My God, it must be magic!"

"Perhaps," replied Madeleine, smiling, "who knows?"

"Ah, forgive me, my friend!" cried Sophie, throwing her arms around the neck of the marquise ; "my surprise was so great that it paralysed my gratitude. You have rescued us from ruin ; we and our children owe

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you everything,—happiness, safety, fortune! Oh, you are our guardian angel!"

The expression of Sophie Dutertre's gratitude was sincere.

At the same time, the marquise observed a sort of constraint in the gestures and gaze of her friend. Her countenance did not seem as serene and radiant as she hoped to see it, at the announcement of such welcome news.

Another grief evidently weighed upon Madame Dutertre, so, after a moment's silence, Madeleine, who had been watching her closely, said:

"Sophie, you are hiding something from me; your sorrow is not at an end."

"Can you think so, when, thanks to you, Madeleine, our future is as bright, as assured, as yesterday it was desperate, when—"

"I tell you, my poor Sophie, you still suffer. Your face ought to be radiant with joy, and yet you cannot disguise your grief."

"Could you believe me ungrateful?"

"I believe your poor heart is wounded, yes, and this wound is so deep that it is not even ameliorated by the good news I brought you."

"Madeleine, I implore you, leave me; do not look at me that way! It pains me. Do not question me, but believe, oh, I beseech you, believe that never in all my life will I forget what we owe to you."

And with these words, Madame Dutertre hid her face in her hands and burst into tears.

The marquise reflected for some minutes, and then said, with hesitation.

"Sophie, where is your husband?"

The young woman started, blushed, and turned pale by turns, and exclaimed, impulsively, almost with fear:

"You wish to see him, then?"

"Yes."

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"I do not know — if he is — this moment in the factory," replied Madame Dutertre, stammering. "But if you wish it, if you insist upon it, I will send for him, so that he may learn from you yourself all that we owe to you."

The marquise shook her head sadly and replied :

"It is not to receive your husband's thanks that I desire to see him, Sophie ; it is only to say farewell to him as well as to you."

"Farewell ?"

"This evening I leave Paris."

"You are going away !" cried Madame Dutertre, and her tone betrayed a singular mingling of surprise, sadness, and joy.

Neither one of these emotions escaped the penetration of Madeleine. She experienced at first a feeling of pain. Her eyes became moist ; then, overcoming her emotion, she said to her friend, smiling, and taking both of Sophie's hands in her own :

"My poor Sophie, you are jealous."

"Madeleine !"

"You are jealous of me, confess it."

"I assure you — "

"Sophie, be frank ; to deny it to me would make me think that you believe that I have been intentionally coqueting with your husband, and God knows I have never seen him but once, and in your presence — "

"Madeleine !" cried the young woman, with effusion, no longer able to restrain her tears, "forgive me ! This feeling is shameful and unworthy, because I know the lofty nature of your heart, and at this time, too, when you have come to save us — but if you only knew !"

"Yes, my good Sophie, if I knew, but I know nothing. Come now, make me your confession to the end ; perhaps it will give me a good idea."

"Madeleine, really I am ashamed ; I would never dare."

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"Come, what are you afraid of, since I am going away? I am going away this evening."

"Wait, it is that which wounds me and provokes me with myself. Your departure distresses me. I had hoped to see you here every day, for a long time, perhaps, and yet—"

"And yet my departure will deliver you from a cruel apprehension, will it not? But it is very simple, my good Sophie. What have you to reproach yourself for? Since this morning, before seeing you, I had resolved to depart."

"Yes, you say that, brave and generous as you always are."

"Sophie, I have not lied; I repeat to you that this morning, before seeing you, my departure was arranged; but, I beseech you, tell me what causes have aroused your jealousy? That is perhaps important for the tranquillity of your future!"

"Ah, well, yesterday evening Charles returned home worn out with fatigue and worry, and alarmed at the prompt measures threatened by M. Pascal. Notwithstanding these terrible afflictions, he spent the whole time talking of you. Then, I confess, the first suspicion entered my mind as to what degree you controlled his thought. Charles went to bed; I remained quietly seated by his pillow. Soon he fell asleep, exhausted by the painful events of the day. At the end of a few minutes, his sleep, at first tranquil, seemed disturbed; two or three times your name passed his lips, then his features would contract painfully, and he would murmur, as if oppressed by remorse, 'Forgive me, Sophie—forgive—and my children—oh, Sophie.' Then he uttered some unintelligible words, and his repose was no longer broken. That is all that has happened, Madeleine, your name was only uttered by my husband during his sleep, and yet I cannot tell you the frightful evil all this has done me; in vain I tried to learn the cause of

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this impression, so deep and so sudden, for Charles had seen you but once, and then hardly a quarter of an hour. No doubt you are beautiful, oh, very beautiful. I cannot be compared with you, I know, yet Charles has always loved me until now." And the young woman wept bitterly.

"Poor, dear Sophie!" said the marquise with tenderness, "calm your fears; he loves you, and will always love you, and you will soon make him forget me."

Madame Dutertre sighed and shook her head sadly. Madeleine continued :

"Believe me, Sophie; it will depend on you to make me forgotten, as it was entirely your own fault that your husband ever thought of me a single instant."

"What do you mean?"

"Just now I provoked your confidence by assuring you that, doubtless, some happy result to you and your husband would be the consequence of it. I was not mistaken."

"Explain, if you please."

"Let us see now. Imagine, dear Sophie, that you are in a confessional," replied Madeleine, smiling, "yes, in the confessional of that great fat abbé, Jolivet, you know, the chaplain of the boarding-school, who put such strange questions to us when we were young girls. So, since that time I have often asked myself why there were not abbesses to confess young girls; but as, without being an abbess, I am a woman," added the marquise, smiling again, "I am going to risk some questions which would have been very tempting to our old confessor. Now, tell me, and do not blush, your husband married you for love, did he not?"

"Alas! yes."

"Well, you need not groan at such a charming recollection."

"Ah, Madeleine, the sadder the present is, the more certain memories tear our hearts."

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“The present and the future will all be what you would like to have it. But, answer me, during the first two or three years of your marriage, you loved each other as lovers, did you not? You understand me?”

The young woman looked downwards and blushed.

“Then by degrees, without any diminution of love, that passionate tenderness gave place to a calmer sentiment, that your love for your children has filled with charm and sweetness; and, finally, the two lovers were only two friends united by the dearest and most sacred duties. Is that true?”

“That is true, Madelcine, and if I must say it, sometimes I have regretted these days of first youth and love; but I reproached myself for these regrets, with the thought that perhaps they were incompatible with the serious duties imposed by motherhood.”

“Poor Sophie! But, tell me, this coolness, or rather this transformation of married lovers to friends, if you choose, was not sudden, was it? It came insensibly and almost without your perceiving it.”

“Practically, yes; but how do you know?”

“One more question, Sophie, dear. In the period of your early love, you and your husband were, I am certain of it, very anxious to please each other. Never could a toilet be fresh or pretty enough. You heightened by painstaking and agreeableness every charm you possessed; indeed, your only thought was to please your husband, to captivate him always, and to keep him always in love. Your Charles, no doubt, preferred some delicate perfume, and your beautiful hair, your garments, exhaled that sweet odour, which, in time of absence, materialises, so to speak, the memory of a beloved woman.”

“That is true; we adored the odour of the violet and the iris. That perfume always recalls to me the happy days of our past.”

“You see plainly, then. As to your husband, I do

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not doubt, he vied with you in the care and elegance and taste of the most trifling details of his toilet. In short, both of you, ardent and passionate, guarded with strictest attention all the delights of your young love. But, alas! from the bosom of this happiness, so easily, so naturally, issued by degrees habit,—that fatal precursor of familiarity, lack of ceremony, neglect of self, habit!—all the more dangerous because it resembles, even so as to be mistaken for it, a sweet and intimate confidence. So, one says: ‘I am sure of being loved, what need of this constant care and painstaking? What are these trifles to true love?’ So, my good Sophie, there came a day when, entirely absorbed by your tenderness for your children, you no longer occupied yourself in finding out if your hair were arranged becomingly, in a style suited to your pretty face, if your dress hung well or badly from your graceful waist, if your little foot were coquettishly dressed in the morning. Your husband, on his part, absorbed in his work as you were by the cares of maternity, neglected himself, too. Unconsciously, your eyes grew accustomed to the change, scarcely perceiving it; as in the same way, so to speak, people never see each other grow old when they live continually together. And it is true, dear Sophie, that if at this moment you should evoke, by memory, the care, the elegance, and the charms with which you and your husband surrounded yourselves in the beautiful time of your courtship, you would be startled with surprise in comparing the present with the past.”

“It is only too true, Madelcine,” replied Sophie, throwing a sad, embarrassed look on her careless attire and disordered hair. “Yes, by degrees I have forgotten the art, or, rather, the desire to please my husband. Alas! it is now too late to repent!”

“Too late!” exclaimed the marquise. “Too late! With your twenty-five years, that attractive face, too late! With that enchanting figure, that magnificent hair, those

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pearly teeth, those large, tender eyes, that hand of a duchess, and those feet of a child, too late ! Let me be your tirewoman for a half-hour, Sophie, and you will see if it is too late to make your husband as passionately in love with you as he ever was."

" Ah, Madeline, you are the only one in the world to give hope to those who have none ; nevertheless, the truth of your words frightens me. Alas, alas ! You are right. Charles loves me no longer."

" He loves you as much and perhaps even more than in the past, poor foolish child, because you are the wife whose fidelity has been tested, the tender mother of his children ; but you are no longer the infatuating mistress of the past, nor has he that tender, passionate love for you he felt in the first days of your wedded bliss. What I say to you, my good Sophie, may be a little harsh, but the good God knows what he has made us. He has created us of immaterial essence. Neither are we all matter, but neither are we all mind. It is true, believe me, that there is something divine in pleasure, but we must guard it, purify it, idealise it. Now, pray pardon this excessive management on my part, as you see that a little appreciation of the sensuous is not too much to awaken a nature benumbed by habit, or else the seductive mistress always has an advantage over the wife ; for, after all, Sophie, why should the duties of wife and mother be incompatible with the charms and enticements of the mistress ? Why should the father, the husband, not be a charming lover ? Yes, my good Sophie, I am going, in a few words, with my usual bluntness, to sum up your position and mine : your husband loves you, but desires you no longer ; he does not love me, and he desires me."

Then the marquise, laughing immoderately, added :

" Is it not strange that I, a young lady, alas ! with no experience in the question,— for I am like a gourmand without a stomach, who presumes to talk of good cheer,—

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is it not strange that I should be giving a lesson to a married woman?"

"Ah, Madeleine," exclaimed Sophie, with effusion, "you have saved us twice to-day, because what my husband feels for you he might have felt for a woman less generous than yourself; and then think of my sorrow, my tears! Oh, you are right, you are right. Charles must see again and find again in his wife the beloved mistress of the past."

The conversation of the two friends was interrupted by the arrival of Antonine.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE conversation of Madeleine and Sophie was interrupted by the arrival of Antonine, who, impetuous as joy, youth, and happiness, entered the room, saying :

“ Sophie, I knew yesterday that Madeleine would be here this morning, and I ran in to tell you that — ”

“ Not a word more, little girl ! ” gaily replied the marquise, kissing Antonine on the forehead ; “ we have not a moment to lose ; we must be to-day as we used to be in school, waiting-maids for Sophie.”

“ What do you mean ? ” said the young woman.

“ But, Madeleine,” replied Antonine, “ I have come to inform you that my contract has been signed by the prince and my uncle, and that — ”

“ Your contract is signed, my child ! That is important and I expected it. You can tell me the rest when we have made our dear Sophie the prettiest and most captivating toilet in the world. It is very important and very urgent.”

Then the marquise whispered in the ear of Madame Dutertre :

“ Your husband may come at any moment ; he must be charmed, fascinated, and he will be.”

Then turning to Antonine, Madeleine added :

“ Quick, quick, my child ; help me to place this table before the window, and we will first arrange Sophie’s hair.”

“ But really, Madeleine,” said Madame Dutertre, smiling, for she was awaking in spite of herself to hope and happiness, “ you are silly.”

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"Not so silly," replied the marquise, making Sophie sit down before the toilet-table.

Uncoiling her friend's magnificent hair, she said :

"With such hair, if I were as ugly as a monster, I would make myself attractive in the highest degree; judge for yourself, Sophie. Here, help me, Antonine, this hair is so long and so thick, I cannot hold it all in my hand."

It was a charming sight to see the three friends of such diverse beauty, thus grouped together. The pure face of Antonine expressed an innocent astonishment at this improvised toilet; Sophie, touched, and distressed by the tender recollections of other days, felt under her veil of brown hair her lovely face, sad and pale up to that moment, colour with an involuntary blush; while Madeleine, handling her friend's superb hair with marvellous skill, was making a ravishing coiffure.

"Now," said the marquise to Sophie, "what gown are you going to wear? But now I think of it, they all fit you horribly, and all of them are cut on the same pattern."

"They are, unfortunately," said Sophie, smiling.

"Very well," replied the marquise, "and all are high-necked, I warrant."

"Yes, all are high-necked," replied poor Sophie.

"Better and better," said Madeleine, "so that these dimpled shoulders, these beautiful arms are condemned to perpetual burial! it is deplorable! Let us see, you have at least some elegant morning gown,—some coquettish dressing-gown,—have you not?"

"My morning gowns are all very simple. It is true that formerly —"

"Formerly?"

"I did have some beautiful ones."

"Well, where are they?"

"I thought they were too young for the mother of a family like me," said Sophie, smiling. "So I relegated

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them, I believe, to a shelf in that wardrobe with the glass door."

The marquise waited to hear no more; she ran to the wardrobe, which she ransacked, and found two or three very pretty morning gowns of striped taffeta of great beauty. She selected one of deep blue, with straw-coloured stripes; the sleeves open and floating exposed the arms to the elbow, and although it lapped over in front, the gown opened enough to show the neck in the most graceful manner possible.

"Admirable!" exclaimed Madeleine, "this gown is as fresh and beautiful as when it was new. Now I must have some white silk stockings to match these Cendrillon slippers I found in this wardrobe where you have buried your arms, Sophie, as they say of warriors who do not go to battle any more."

"But, my dear Madeleine," said Sophie, "I—"

"There are no 'buts,'" said the marquise, impatiently, "I wish and expect, when your husband enters here, he will think he has gone back five years."

In spite of a feeble resistance, Sophie Dutertre was docile and obedient to the advice and pretty attentions of her friend. Soon, half recumbent on an easy chair, in a languishing attitude, she consented that the marquise should give the finishing touch to the living picture. Finally Madeleine arranged a few curls of the rich brown hair around the neck of dazzling whiteness, lifted the sleeves so as to show the dimpled elbows, opened somewhat the neck of the gown, notwithstanding the chaste scruples of Sophie, and draped the skirt with provoking premeditation, so as to reveal the neatest ankle and prettiest little foot in the world.

It must be said that Sophie was charming,—emotion, hope, expectation, and a vague disquietude, colouring her sweet and attractive face, animated her appearance, and gave a bewitching expression to her features.

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Antonine, struck with the wonderful metamorphosis, exclaimed, innocently, clapping her little hands :

“ Why, Sophie, I did not know you were as pretty as that ! ”

“ Nor did Sophie know it,” replied Madeleine, shrugging her shoulders, “I have exhumed so many attractions.”

Just then Madame Dutertre’s servant, having knocked at the door, entered, and said to her mistress :

“ Monsieur desires to speak to madame. He is in the shop, and wishes to know if madame is at home.”

“ He knows you are here,” whispered Sophie to Madeleine, with a sigh.

“ Make him come up,” replied the marquise, softly.

“ Tell M. Dutertre that I am at home,” said Sophie to the servant, who went out.

Madeleine, addressing her friend in a voice full of emotion, as she extended her arms to her, said :

“ And now, good-bye, Sophie ; tell your husband that he is delivered from M. Pascal.”

“ You are going already ? ” said Sophie, with sadness ; “ when shall I see you again ? ”

“ I do not know,—some day, perhaps. But I hear your husband’s step. I leave you.”

Then she added, smiling :

“ Only I would like to hide behind that curtain and enjoy your triumph.”

And making a sign to Antonine to accompany her, she retired behind the curtain which separated the room from the next chamber, just as M. Dutertre entered. For some moments the eyes of Charles wandered as if he were looking for some one he expected to meet ; he had not discovered the change in Sophie, who said to him :

“ Charles, we are saved, here is the non-suit of M. Pascal.”

“ Great God ! can it be true ? ” cried Dutertre, looking over the paper his wife had just delivered to him ; then,

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raising his eyes, he beheld Sophie in her bewitching, coquettish toilet. After a short silence produced by surprise and admiration, he exclaimed :

“ Sophie ! what do I see ? This toilet so charming, so new ! Is it to celebrate our day of deliverance ? ”

“ Charles,” replied Sophie, smiling and blushing by turns, “ this toilet is not new ; some years ago, if you remember, you admired me in it.”

“ If I remember ! ” cried Dutertre, feeling a thousand tender memories awaken in his mind. “ Ah, it was the beautiful time of our ardent love, and this happy time is born again, it exists. I see you again as in the past ; your beauty shines in my eyes with a new brilliancy. I do not know what this enchantment is ; but this elegance, this grace, this coquetry, your blushes and the sweet perfume of the iris we used to love so much,— all transport me and intoxicate me ! Never, no, never, have I seen you more beautiful ! ” added Dutertre, in a passionate voice, as he kissed Sophie’s little hands. “ Oh, yes, it is you, it is you, I have found you again, adored mistress of my first love ! ”

“ Now, little girl, I think it is altogether proper that we should retire,” whispered Madeleine to Antonine, unable to keep from laughing.

And both, stealing away on tiptoe, left the parlour, the door of which the marquise discreetly closed, and went into the study of M. Dutertre, which opened into the garden.

“ Just now, Madeleine,” said Antonine to the marquise, “ you did not let me finish what I came to tell you.”

“ Very well, speak, my child.”

“ Count Frantz is here.”

“ He here ! ” said the marquise, starting with a feeling of sudden disappointment. “ And why and how is Count Frantz here ? ”

“ Knowing from me that you would be here this morning,” said Antonine, “ he has come to thank you

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for all your kindness to us. He is waiting in the garden,— wait,— there he is!” With these words the young girl pointed to Frantz, who was seated on a bench in the garden.

Madeleine threw a long and last look on her blond archangel, nor could she restrain the tears which rose to her eyes; then, kissing Antonine on the brow, she said, in a slightly altered voice:

“Good-bye, my child.”

“Why, Madeleine,” exclaimed the young girl, astounded at so abrupt a departure, “will you go away without wishing to see Frantz? Why, that is impossible — but you will —”

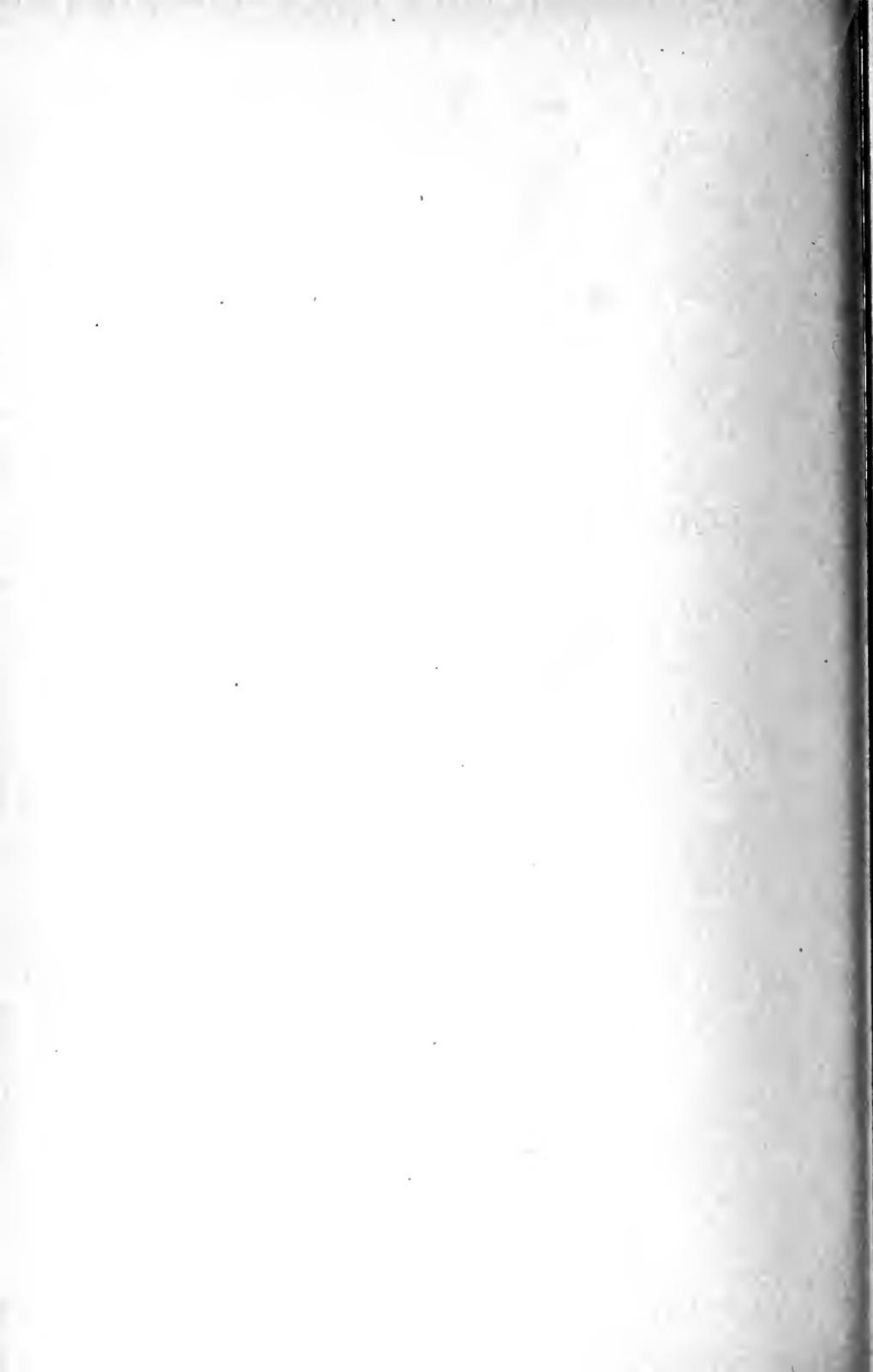
The marquise put her finger on her lips as a sign to Antonine to keep silence; then walking away, turning her eyes only once to that side of the garden, she disappeared.

Two hours after, the Marquise de Miranda quit Paris, leaving this note for the archduke:

“MONSEIGNEUR:—I am going to wait for you in Vienna; come and complete your capture of me.

“MADELEINE.”

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GLUTTONY
—
DOCTOR GASTERINI



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CHAPTER I.

TOWARD the end of the month of October, 18—, the following conversation occurred in the convent of St. Rosalie, between the mother superior, whose name was Sister Prudence, and a certain Abbé Ledoux, whom perhaps the readers of these recitals will remember.

The abbé had just entered the private parlour of Sister Prudence, a woman about fifty years old, with a pale and serious face and a sharp, penetrating eye.

"Well, dear abbé," said she, "what news from Dom Diégo? When will he arrive?"

"The canon has arrived, my dear sister."

"With his niece?"

"With his niece."

"God be praised! Now, my dear abbé, let us pray Heaven to bless our plans."

"Without doubt, my dear sister, we will pray, but, above all, let us play a sure game, for it will not be easy to win."

"What do you say?"

"The truth. This truth I have learned only this morning, and here it is; give me, I pray you, all your attention."

"I am listening, my dear brother."

"Moreover, that we may better agree, and clearly un-

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derstand our position, let us first settle the condition of things in our minds. Two months ago, Rev. Father Benoit, who is engaged in foreign missions, and at present is in Cadiz, wrote to me recommending to my especial consideration Lord Dom Diégo, Canon of Alcantara, who was to sail from Cadiz to France with his niece, Dolores Salcedo."

"Very well, my brother."

"Father Benoit added that he was sufficiently acquainted with the character and disposition of Dolores Saleedo to feel sure that she could be easily persuaded to take the veil, a resolution which would have the approval of her uncle, Dom Diégo."

"And, as she is the only heir of the rich canon, the house which she will enter will be greatly benefited by the fortune she inherits."

"Exactly so, my dear sister. Naturally, I have thought of our convent of Ste. Rosalie for Senora Dolores, and I have spoken to you of these intentions."

"I have adopted them, my dear brother, because, having some experience with young girls, I feel almost sure that I can, by persuasion, guard this innocent dove from the snares of a seductive and corrupt world, and decide her to take the veil in our house. I shall be doing two good works: save a young girl, and turn to the good of the poor riches which, in other hands, would be used for evil; I cannot hesitate."

"Without doubt; but, now, my dear sister, the inconvenient thing is, that this innocent dove has a lover."

"What do you tell me, my brother? What horror! But then, our plans."

"I have just warned you that we must play a sure game."

"And how have you learned this shocking thing, my dear brother?"

"By the majordomo of Dom Diégo, a modest servant

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who keeps me informed of everything he can learn about the canon and his niece."

"These instructions are indispensable, my brother, because they enable us to act with intelligence and security. But what ideas has this majordomo given you concerning this unfortunate love, my dear brother?"

"Hear, now, how things have happened. The canon and his niece embarked at Cadiz, on a three-master coming from the Indies, and sailing for Bordeaux. Really, now, how many strange fatalities do occur!"

"What fatalities?"

"In the first place, the name of this vessel on which they embarked was named *Gastronome*."

"Why, what a singular name for a vessel!"

"Less singular than it appears at first, my dear sister, because this vessel, after having carried to the Indies the best unfermented wines of Bordeaux and the south, hams from Bayonne, smoked tongues from Troyes, pastry from Amiens and Strasbourg, tunnies and olives from Marseilles, cheese from Switzerland, preserved fruits from Touraine and Montpellier, etc., came back by the Cape of Good Hope with a cargo of wines from Constance, pepper, cinnamon, cloves, tea, salted meats of Hachar, and other comestibles of the Indies. She was to add to her cargo by taking on at Cadiz a large quantity of Spanish wine, and afterward return to Bordeaux."

"Good God, my brother! what a quantity of wine and food! It is enough to make one shudder. I understand now why the vessel was named the *Gastronome*."

"And you understand at the same time, my sister, why I spoke to you of strange fatalities, and why the Canon Dom Diégo preferred to embark on the *Gastronome*, rather than on any other vessel, without any regard to her destination."

"Please explain yourself, my brother."

"As for that, I ought first to inform you that I myself

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was in ignorance before my secret conference with the majordomo on the subject of the canon ; the fact is, he is a fabulous, unheard-of glutton."

"Oh, my brother, what a horrible sin!"

"Horrible sin it may be, but do not abuse this sin too much, my dear sister, for, thanks to it, we may perhaps be able to compass our praiseworthy end and win our game."

"And how is that, my brother ?"

"I am going to tell you. The canon is an ideal glutton. All his faculties, all his thoughts, are concentrated upon one sole pleasure,—the table ; and it seems that at Madrid and at Cadiz his table was absolutely marvellous, because now I remember that my physician, Doctor Gasterini —"

"An abominable atheist! a Sardanapalus!" exclaimed Sister Prudence, interrupting Abbé Ledoux, and raising both hands to heaven. "I have never understood why you receive the medical attentions of such a miscreant!"

"I will tell you that some day, my dear sister, but, believe me, I know what I am doing. Besides, notwithstanding his great age, Doctor Gasterini is still the first physician in Paris, as he is the first glutton in the world ; but, as I was saying to you, my sister, I now remember having heard him speak of a Spanish canon's table,—a table which, according to one of the doctor's correspondents in Madrid, was truly remarkable. At that time I was far from suspecting that it was Dom Diégo who was the subject of their correspondence. However, the poor man is a fool,—a man of small ability, and influenced by all those absurd Southern superstitions. So, upon the authority of the majordomo, it will be easy to make this gluttonous canon see the devil in flesh and bones!"

"One moment, my brother. I am not altogether displeased with the canon's foolish superstition."

"Nor I, my sister ; on the contrary, it suits me

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exactly. That is not all. The canon, thanks to his religion, is not deceived about the grossness of his ruling passion. He knows that gluttony is one of the seven deadly sins. He believes that his sin will send him to hell, yet he has not the courage to resist it; he eats with voluptuousness, and remorse comes only when he is no longer hungry."

"Instead of remorse, he ought to have indigestion, unhappy man!" said Sister Prudence. "That, perhaps, might cure him."

"True, my sister, but that is not the case. However, the canon's life is passed in enjoying and regretting that he has enjoyed; sometimes remorse, aided by superstition, leads him to expect some sudden and terrible punishment from heaven, but when appetite returns remorse is forgotten, and thus has it been a long time with the canon."

"After all, my brother, I think him far less culpable than this Sardanapalus, your Doctor Gasterini, who impudently indulges his appetite without compunction. The canon is, at least, conscious of his sin, and that is something."

"Since the character of the canon is now understood, you will not be astonished that, finding himself at Cadiz, and learning that a ship named the *Gastronome* was about to sail for France, Dom Diégo seized the opportunity to embark on a vessel so happily named, so as to be able, on his arrival at Bordeaux, to purchase several tons of the choicest wines."

"Certainly. I understand that, my dear brother."

"Well, then, Dom Diégo embarked with his niece on board the *Gastronome*. It is impossible to imagine — so the majordomo told me — the quantity of stores, provisions, and refreshments of all sorts with which the canon encumbered the deck of this vessel, — obstructions invariably forbidden by all rules of navigation, — but the commander of this ship, a certain Captain Horace,

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miscreant that he is, had only too good reason for ignoring discipline and making himself agreeable to the canon."

"And this reason, my brother?"

"Fascinated by the beauty of the niece, when Dom Diégo came with her to stipulate the terms of his passage, this contemptible captain, suddenly enamoured of Dolores Salcedo, and expecting to profit by opportunities the voyage would offer, granted all that Dom Diégo demanded, in the hope of seeing him embark with his niece."

"What villainy on the part of this captain, my brother!"

"Fortunately, Heaven has punished him for it, and that can save us. Well, the canon and his niece embarked on board the *Gastronome*, laden with all that could tempt or satisfy appetite. Just as they left port a terrible tempest arose, and the safety of the vessel required everything to be thrown into the sea, not only the canon's provisions, but cages of birds and beasts taken aboard for the sustenance of the passengers. This squall, which drove the vessel far from the coast of Bordeaux, lasted so long and with such fury that almost the entire voyage it was impossible to do any cooking, and passengers, sailors, and officers were reduced to the fare of dry biscuit and salt meat."

"Oh, the unhappy canon! what became of him?"

"He became furious, my sister, because this passage actually cost him his appetite."

"Ah, my brother, the finger of Providence was there!"

"In a word, whether by reason of the terror caused by the tempest, or a long deprivation of choice food, or whether the detestable nourishment he was compelled to take impaired his health, the canon, since he disembarked from the *Gastronome*, has completely lost his appetite. The little that he eats to sustain him, the majordomo tells me, is insipid and unpalatable, no mat-

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ter how well prepared it may be; and more, he is tormented by the idea or superstition that Heaven has justly punished him for his inordinate indulgence. And, as Captain Horace is in his eyes the chief instrument of Heaven's anger, the canon has taken an unconquerable dislike to the miscreant, not forgetting, too, that all his luxuries were thrown into the sea by order of the captain. In vain has the captain tried to make him comprehend that his own salvation, as well as that of many others, depended on this sacrifice; Dom Diégo remains inflexible in his hatred. Well, my dear sister, would you believe that, notwithstanding that, the captain, upon his arrival at Bordeaux, had the audacity to ask of Dom Diégo the hand of his niece in marriage, assuming that this unhappy young girl was in love with him. You appreciate the fact, my sister, that two lovers do not remember bad cheer or terrible tempests, and that this miscreant has bewildered the innocent creature. I need not tell you of the fury of Dom Diégo at this insolent proposal from the captain, whom he regards as his mortal enemy, as the bad spirit sent to him by the anger of Heaven. So the canon has informed Dolores that, as a punishment for having dared to fall in love with such a scoundrel, he would put her in a convent upon his arrival in Paris, and that she should there take the veil."

"But, my brother, so far I see only success for our plans. Everything seems to favour them."

"Yes, my sister; but you are counting without the love of Dolores, and the resolute character of this damned captain."

"What audacity!"

"He followed on horseback, relay after relay, the carriage of the canon, galloping from Bordeaux to Paris like a state messenger. He must have a constitution of iron. He stopped at every inn where Dom Diégo stopped, and during the journey Dolores and the

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captain were ogling each other, in spite of the rage and resistance of Dom Diégo. Could he prevent this lovesick girl looking out of the window? Could he prevent this miscreant riding on the highway by the side of his carriage?"

"Such audacity seems incredible, does it not, my brother?"

"Which is the reason I tell you we must be on guard everywhere from this madman. He is not alone; one of his sailors, a veritable blackguard, accompanied him, riding behind in his train, and holding on to his horse like a monkey on a donkey, so the majordomo told me. But that did not matter, this demon of a sailor is capable of anything to help his captain, to whom he is devoted. And that is not all. Twenty times on the route Dolores positively told her uncle that she did not wish to become a religious, that she wished to marry the captain, and that he would know how to come to her if they constrained her,—he and his sailor would deliver her if they had to set fire to the convent."

"What a bandit!" cried Sister Prudence. "What a desperate villain!"

"You see, dear sister, how things were yesterday, when Dom Diégo took possession of the apartment I had previously engaged for him. This morning he desired me to visit him. I found him in bed and very much depressed. He told me that a sudden revolution had taken place in the mind of his niece; that now she seemed as submissive and resigned as she had been rebellious, that she had at last consented to go to the convent, and to-day if it was required."

"My brother, my brother, this is a very sudden and timely change."

"Such is my opinion, my sister, and, if I am not mistaken, this sudden change hides some snare. I have told you we must play a sure game. It is a great deal, no doubt, to have this love-sick girl in our hands; but we

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must not forget the enemy, this detestable Captain Horace, who, accompanied by his sailor, will no doubt be prowling around the house, like the ravening wolf spoken of in the Scriptures."

"*Quærens quem devoret,*" said Sister Prudence, who prided herself upon her Latin.

"Just so, my sister, seeking whom he may devour, but, fortunately, there's a good watch-dog for every good wolf, and we have intelligent and courageous servants. The strictest watchfulness must be established without and within. We will soon know where this miscreant of a captain lives; he will not take a step without being followed by one of our men. He will be very clever and very brave if he accomplishes anything."

"This watchfulness seems to me very necessary, my dear brother."

"Now my carriage is below, let us go to the canon's apartments, and in an hour his niece will be here."

"Never to go out of this house, if it pleases Heaven, my brother, because it is for the eternal happiness of this poor foolish girl."

Two hours after this conversation Senora Dolores Salcedo entered the Convent of Ste. Rosalie.

CHAPTER II.

A FEW days after the entrance of Senora Dolores Salcedo in the house of Ste. Rosalie, and just at the close of the day, two men were slowly walking along the Boulevard de l'Hopital, one of the most deserted places in Paris.

The younger of these two individuals seemed to be about twenty-five or thirty years old. His face was frank and resolute, his complexion sunburnt, his figure tall and robust, his step decided, and his dress simple and of military severity.

His companion, a little shorter, but unusually square and thick-set, seemed to be about fifty-five years old, and presented that type of the sailor familiar to the eyes of Parisians. An oilcloth hat, low in shape, with a wide brim, placed on the back of his head, revealed a brow ornamented with five or six corkscrew curls, known as heart-catchers, while the rest of his hair was cut very close. This manner of wearing the hair, called the sailor style, was, if traditions are true, quite popular in 1825 among crews of the line sailing from the port of Brest.

A white shirt with a blue collar, embroidered in red, falling over his broad shoulders, permitted a view of the bull like neck of our sailor, whose skin was tanned until it resembled parchment, the colour of brick. A round vest of blue cloth, with buttons marked with an anchor, and wide trousers bound to his hips by a red woollen girdle, completed our man's apparel. Side-whiskers of brown, shaded with fawn colour, encased his square face,

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which expressed both good humour and decision of character. A superficial observer might have supposed the left cheek of the sailor to be considerably inflamed, but a more attentive examination would have disclosed the fact that an enormous quid of tobacco produced this one-sided tunefaction. Let us add, lastly, that the sailor carried on his back a bag, whose contents seemed quite bulky.

The two men had just reached a place in front of a high wall surrounding a garden. The top of the trees could scarcely be distinguished, for the night had fallen.

The young man said to his companion, as he stopped and turned his ear eastward :

“ Sans-Plume, listen.”

“ Please God, what is it, captain ? ” said the man with the tobacco quid, in reply to this singular surname.

“ I am not mistaken, it is certainly here.”

“ Yes, captain, it is in this made land between these two large trees. Here is the place where the wall is a little damaged. I noticed it yesterday evening at dusk, when we picked up the stone and the letter.

“ That is so. Come quick, my old seaman,” said the captain to his sailor, indicating with his eye one of the large trees of the boulevard, several of whose branches hung over the garden wall. “ Up, Sans-Plume, while we are waiting the hour let us see if we can rig the thing.”

“ Captain, there is still a bit of twilight, and I see below a man who is coming this way.”

“ Then let us wait. Hide first your bag behind the trunk of this tree,—you have forgotten nothing ? ”

“ No, captain, all my rigging is in there.”

“ Come, then, let us go. This man is coming; we must not look as if we were lying to before these walls.”

“ That’s it, captain, we’ll stand upon another tack so as to put him out of his way.”

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And the two sailors began, as Sans-Plume had said in his picturesque language, to stand the other tack in the path parallel to the public walk, after the sailor had prudently picked up the bag he had hidden between the trees of the boulevard and the wall.

“ Sans-Plume,” said the young man, as they walked along, “ are you sure you recognise the spot where the hackney-coach awaits us ?”

“ Yes, captain — But, I say, captain.”

“ What ?”

“ That man looks as if he were following us.”

“ Bah !”

“ And spying on us.”

“ Come along, Sans-Plume, you are foolish !”

“ Captain, let us set the prow larboard and you go and see.”

“ So be it,” replied the captain.

And, followed by his sailor, he left the walk on the right of the boulevard, crossed the pavement, and took the walk on the left.

“ Well, captain,” said Sans-Plume, in a low voice, “ you see this lascar navigates in our waters.”

“ That is true, we are followed.”

“ It is not the first time it has happened to me,” said Sans-Plume, with a shade of conceit, hiding one-half of his mouth with the back of his hand in order to eject the excess of tobacco juice produced by the mastication of his enormous quid. “ One day, in Senegal, Gorée, I was followed a whole league, bowsprit on stern, captain, till I came to a plantation of sugar-cane, and — ”

“ The devil ! that man is surely following us,” said the captain, interrupting the indiscreet confidences of the sailor. “ That annoys me !”

“ Captain, do you wish me to drop my bag and flank this lascar with tobacco, in order to teach him to ply to our windward in spite of us ?”

“ Fine thing ! but do you keep still and follow me.”

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The captain and his sailor, again crossing the pavement, regained the walk on the right.

"See, captain," said Sans-Plume, "he turns tack with us."

"Let him go, and let us watch his steps."

The man who followed the two sailors, a large, jolly-looking fellow in a blue blouse and cap, went beyond them a few steps, then stopped and looked up at the stars, for the night had fully come.

The captain, after saying a few words in a low tone to the sailor who had hidden himself behind the trunk of one of the large trees of the boulevard, advanced alone to meet his disagreeable observer, and said to him :

"Comrade, it is a fine evening."

"Very fine."

"You are waiting for some one here?"

"Yes."

"I, also."

"Ah!"

"Comrade, have you been waiting long?"

"For three hours at least."

"Comrade," replied the captain, after a moment's silence, "would you like to make double the sum they give you for following me and spying me?"

"I do not know what you mean. I do not follow you, sir. I am not spying you."

"Yes."

"No."

"Let us end this. I will give you what you want if you will go on your way,—stop, I have the gold in my pocket."

And the captain tingled the gold in his vest pocket, and said :

"I have twenty-five or thirty louis —"

"Hein!" said the man, with a singularly insinuating manner, "twenty-five or thirty louis?"

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At this moment a distant clock sounded half-past seven o'clock. Almost at the same instant a guttural cry, resembling a call or a signal, was heard in the direction that the man in the blouse had first taken to join the two sailors. The spy made a movement as if he understood the significance of this cry, and for a moment seemed undecided.

"Half-past seven o'clock," said the captain to himself. "That beggar there is not alone."

Having made this reflection, he coughed.

Scarcely had the captain coughed, when the spy felt himself seized vigorously at the ankles by some one who had thrown himself suddenly between his legs. He fell backwards, but in falling he had time to cry with a loud voice :

"Here, John, run to the —"

He was not able to finish. Sans-Plume, after having thrown him down, had unceremoniously taken a seat on the breast of the spy, and, holding him by the throat, prevented his speaking.

"The devil! do not strangle him," said the captain, who, kneeling down, was binding securely with his silk handkerchief the two legs of the indiscreet busy-body.

"The bag, captain," said Sans-Plume, keeping his grip on the throat of the spy, "the bag! it is large enough to wrap his head and arms; we will bind him tight around the loins and he will not budge any more than a roll of old canvas."

No sooner said than done. In a few seconds the spy, cowled like a monk in the bag to the middle of his body, with his legs bound, found himself unable to move. Sans-Plume had the courtesy to push his victim into one of the wide verdant slopes which separated the trees, and nothing more was heard from that quarter but an interrupted series of smothered bellowings.

"The alarm will be given at the convent! Half-past

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seven has just struck," said the captain to his sailor.
"We must risk all now or all is lost!"

"In twice three movements the thing is ready, captain," replied Sans-Plume, running with his companion toward the large trees which hung over the wall near which they had at first stood.

CHAPTER III.

WHILE these events were transpiring on the boulevard, and a little before half after seven had sounded, another scene was taking place in the interior of the convent garden. Sister Prudence, the mother superior, and Dolores Salcedo were walking in the garden, notwithstanding the advanced hour of the evening.

Dolores, a brunette of charming appearance, united in herself the rare and bewitching perfections of Spanish beauty. Hair of a blue black, which, when uncoiled, dragged upon the floor; a pale complexion warmed by the sun of the South; large eyes, by turns full of fire and languid sweetness; a little mouth as red as the bud of the pomegranate steeped in dew; a delicate and voluptuous form, tapering fingers, and an Andalusian foot and ankle, completed her list of charms. As to the exquisite grace of her figure and gait, one must, to have any idea of it, have seen the undulating movements of the beautiful senoras of Seville or Cadiz, when, speaking with their eyes or playing with their fans, they slowly promenade, a beautiful summer evening, on the marble floor of the Alameda.

Dolores accompanied Sister Prudence. Walking and talking, the two women approached the wall behind which Captain Horace and his sailor had stopped.

"You see, my dear daughter," said the mother superior to Dolores, "I grant you all you desire, and, although the rules of the house forbid promenades in the garden after nightfall, I have consented to stay here

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until half-past seven o'clock, our supper hour, which will soon sound."

"I thank you, madame," said Dolores, with a slight Spanish accent, and in a voice deliciously resonant. "I feel that this promenade will do me good."

"You must call me mother and not madame, my dear daughter, I have already told you that it is the custom here."

"I will conform to it, if I can, madame."

"Again!"

"It is difficult to call a person mother who is not your mother," said Dolores, with a sigh.

"I am your spiritual mother, my dear daughter; your mother in God, as you are, as you will be, my daughter in God; because you will leave us no more, you will renounce the deceitful pleasures of a perverse and corrupt world, you will have here a heavenly foretaste of eternal peace."

"I begin to discover it, madame."

"You will live in prayer, silence, and meditation."

"I have no other desire, madame."

"Well, well, my dear daughter, after all, what will you sacrifice?"

"Oh, nothing, absolutely nothing!"

"I like that response, my dear daughter; really, it is nothing, less than nothing, these wicked and worldly passions which cause us so much sorrow and throw us in the way of perdition."

"Just Heaven! it makes me tremble to think of it, madame."

"The Lord inspires you to answer thus, my dear daughter, and I am sure now that you can hardly understand how you have been able to love this miscreant captain."

"It is true, madame, I was stupid enough to dream of happiness and the joys of family affection; criminal enough to find this happiness in mutual love and hope

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to become, like many others, a devoted wife and tender mother ; it was, as you have told me, an offence to Heaven. I repent my impious vows, I comprehend all that is odious in them ; you must pardon me, madame, for having been wicked and silly to such a degree."

"It is not necessary to exaggerate, my dear daughter," said Sister Prudence, struck with the slightly ironical accent with which Dolores had uttered these last words. "But," added she, observing the direction taken by the young girl, "what is the good of returning to this walk ? It will soon be the hour for supper ; come, my dear daughter, let us go back to the house."

"Oh, madame, do you not perceive that sweet odour on this side of the grove ?"

"Those are a few clusters of mignonette. But come, it is getting cool ; I am not sixteen like you, my dear daughter, and I am afraid of catching cold."

"Just one moment, please, that I may gather a few of these flowers."

"Go on, then, you must do everything you wish, my dear daughter ; stop, the night is clear enough for you to see this mignonette ten steps away ; go and gather a few sprigs and return."

Dolores, letting go the arm of the mother superior, went rapidly toward the clusters of flowers.

At this moment half-past seven o'clock sounded.

"Half-past seven," murmured Dolores, trembling and turning her ear to listen, "he is there, he will come !"

"My dear daughter, it is the hour for supper," said the mother superior, walking on ahead of the canon's niece. "Stop, do you not hear the clock ? Quick ! quick ! come, it will take ten minutes to reach the house, for we are at the bottom of the garden."

"Here I am, madame," replied the young girl, running before the mother superior, who said to her, with affected sweetness :

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“ Oh, you foolish little thing, you run like a frightened fawn.”

Suddenly Dolores shrieked, and fell on her knees.

“ Great God ! ” cried Sister Prudence, running up to her, “ what is the matter, dear daughter ? Why did you scream ? What are you on your knees for ? ”

“ Ah, madame ! ”

“ But what is it ? ”

“ What pain ! ”

“ Where ? ”

“ In my foot, madame, I have sprained my ankle. Oh, how I suffer ! My God, how I suffer ! ”

“ Try to get up, my dear child,” said the mother, approaching Dolores with a vague distrust, for this sprain seemed to her quite unnatural.

“ Oh, impossible, madame, I cannot make a movement.”

“ But try, at least.”

“ I wish I could.”

And the young girl made a show of wishing to stand up, but she fell again on her knees, with a shriek that could be heard on the other side of the garden wall.

Then Dolores said, with a groan :

“ You see, madame, it is impossible for me to move. I pray you return to the house, and tell some one to come for me with a chair or a litter. Oh, how I suffer ! My God, how I suffer ! For pity’s sake, madame, go back quick to the house ; it is so far, I shall never be able to drag myself there.”

“ Mademoiselle,” cried the mother superior, “ I am not your dupe ! You have no more of a sprain than I have, it is an abominable falsehood ! You wish, I know not for what reason, to send me away, and remain alone in the garden. Ah, indeed you make me repent of my condescension.”

The light noise of a few pebbles falling across the boughs of the trees attracted the attention of the

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mother superior and Dolores, who, radiant with delight, leaped up with a bound, exclaiming :

“ There he is ! ”

“ Of whom are you speaking, unhappy girl ? ”

“ Of Captain Horace, madame,” said Dolores, curtseying with mock reverence. “ He is coming to carry me away.”

“ What impudence ! Ah, you think that in spite of me — ”

“ We are at the bottom of the garden, madame ; cry, call, nobody will hear you.”

“ Oh, what horrible treason ! ” cried the mother superior. “ But it is impossible ! The men on guard have not dared leave the boulevard since nightfall.”

“ Horatio ! ” cried Dolores, in a clear, silvery voice. “ My Horatio ! ”

“ Shameless creature ! ” cried Sister Prudence, in desperation, rushing forward to seize Dolores by the arm. But the Spanish girl, nimble as a gazelle, with two bounds was out of the reach of Sister Prudence, whose limbs, stiffened by age, refused to lend themselves to gymnastic exercise ; and already overcome, she cried, wringing her hands :

“ Oh, those miserable patrols ! They have not been on guard. I would cry, but they would not hear me at the convent. To run there is to leave this wretched girl here alone ! Ah, I understand too late why this serpent wished to prolong our walk.”

“ Horatio,” cried Dolores a second time, holding herself at a distance from the mother superior, “ my dear Horatio ! ”

“ Descend ! ” cried a ringing male voice which seemed to come from the sky.

This celestial voice was no other than that of Captain Horace, giving the signal to his faithful Sans-Plume to descend something.

The mother superior and Dolores, notwithstanding

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the difference of the emotions which agitated them, raised their eyes simultaneously when they heard the voice of Captain Horace.

But let us recall the situation of the walk and garden in order to explain the miracle about to be manifested to the sight of the recluse.

Two of the largest branches of the trees on the boulevard outside extended like a gibbet, so to speak, above and beyond the coping of the convent wall. The night was so clear that Dolores and the mother superior saw, slowly descending, sustained by cords, an Indian hammock in the bottom of which Captain Horace was extended, throwing with his hand a shower of kisses to Dolores.

When the hammock was within two feet of the earth, the captain called, in a ringing voice: "Stop!"

The hammock rested motionless. The captain leaped out of it, and said to the young girl:

"Quick, we have not a moment to lose! Dear Dolores, get into this hammock at once and do not be afraid."

"You will kill me first, villain!" cried the mother superior, throwing herself upon the young girl, whom she held within her arms, at the same time crying out, "Help! help!"

At this moment lights could be seen coming and going at a distance from the bottom of the garden.

"Here comes somebody at last!" screamed Sister Prudence, redoubling her cries of "Help! help!"

"Madame," said the captain, "let loose Dolores immediately!" And he forcibly withdrew the young girl from the obstinate embrace, holding Sister Prudence until Dolores could spring into the hammock. Seeing her safely seated there, the captain called:

"Ho there! Hoist."

And the hammock rose rapidly, so light was the weight of the young girl.

Sister Prudence, thoroughly enraged, and thinking that

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help would come perhaps too late, for the lights were still distant, screamed louder than ever, and threw herself on the hammock, to hold it down; but the captain drew her arm familiarly within his own, and, in spite of her struggles, held her like a vice.

“Dolores,” said the captain, “do not be afraid, my love. When you reach the large branches, yield yourself without fear to the motion which will draw the hammock outside the wall. Sans-Plume is on the other side, and he is watching everything. Tell him, as soon as you reach the earth, to throw me the knotted rope, and hold it well on the outside.”

“Yes, my Horatio,” said Dolores, who was already eight or ten feet above the earth; “be calm, our love doubles my courage.”

And the young mocker, leaning out of the hammock, said, with a laugh;

“Good evening, Sister Prudence, good evening!”

“You will be damned, accursed creature,” said the mother superior.

“But you, you wretch! you shall not escape me,” added she, holding on with desperate and convulsive anger to the captain’s arm.

“They are coming, and you will be taken.”

In fact, the lights were becoming more and more visible, and the captain could distinctly hear the voices of persons calling:

“Sister Prudence! Sister Prudence!”

The arrival of this aid increased the strength of the mother superior, who still clinched the arm of Horace. She was beginning to embarrass the sailor quite seriously; he could not resort to violence to escape this aged woman. In the meanwhile, the lights and the voices came nearer and nearer, and Sans-Plume, occupied, no doubt, in assuring the safe descent of Dolores on the other side of the wall, had not yet thrown the rope, his only means of flight. Then wishing, at any cost, to





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extricate himself from the grasp of the sister, the captain said to her :

“ I pray you, madame, release me.”

“ Never, villain. Help, help ! ”

“ Then pardon me, madame, because you force me to it. I am going to dance with you an infernal waltz, a riotous polka.”

“ A polka with me ! You dare ! ”

“ Come, madame, since you insist upon it we must. Keep time to the air. Tra, la, la, la.”

And joining the act to the words, the merry sailor passed the arm that was free around the bony waist of Sister Prudence, and carried her with him, singing his refrain and whirling her around with such rapidity that, at the end of a few seconds, bewildered, dizzy, and suffocated, she could only gasp the syllables :

“ Ah, help — help — you — wretch ! He — takes — my — breath ! Help — help ! ”

And soon overcome by the rapid whirling, Sister Prudence felt her strength failing. The captain saw her about to faint on his arms, and only had time to lay her gently on the grass.

“ Ho ! ” at this moment cried Sans-Plume on the other side of the wall, as he threw over the knotted rope to the captain.

“ The devil, it is high time ! ” said the captain, rushing after the rope, for the lights and the persons who carried them were no more than fifty steps distant.

Armed with pitchforks and guns, they approached the mother superior, who had recovered sufficiently to point over the wall as she said :

“ There he is getting away ! ”

One of the men, armed with a gun, guided by her gesture, saw the captain, who, thanks to his agility as a sailor, had just gained the crest of the wall.

The man fired his gun, but missed his aim.

“ You ! You ! ” cried he to another man armed like

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himself. "There he is on the top of the wall reaching for the branches of that tree,—fire!"

The second shot was fired just at the moment when Captain Horace, astride one of the branches projecting over the garden, was approaching the trunk of the tree, by means of which he meant to descend on the outside. Scarcely had the second shot been fired, when Horace made a sudden leap, stopped a moment, and then disappeared in the thick foliage of the trees.

"Run! run outside!" cried Sister Prudence, still panting for breath. "There is still time to catch them!"

The orders of the mother superior were executed, but when they arrived on the boulevard outside, Dolores, the captain, and Sans-Plume had disappeared. They found nothing but the hammock, which was lying a few steps from the spy, who, enveloped in his bag, dolefully uttering smothered groans at the bottom of the ditch.

CHAPTER IV.

EIGHT days after the abduction of Dolores Salcedo by Captain Horace, Abbé Ledoux, in bed, received the visit of his physician.

The invalid, lying in a soft bed standing in the alcove of a comfortable apartment, had always a fat and ruddy face ; his triple chin descended to the collar of a fine shirt made of Holland cloth, and the purple brilliancy of the holy man's complexion contrasted with the immaculate whiteness of his cotton cap, bound, according to the ancient custom, with an orange-coloured ribbon. Notwithstanding these indications of plethoric health, the abbé, his head propped on his pillow in a doleful manner, uttered from time to time the most plaintive groans, while his hand, small and effeminate, was given to his physician, who was gravely feeling his pulse.

Doctor Gasterini,—such was the name of the physician,—although seventy-five years old, did not look sixty. Tall and erect, as well as lean and nervous, with a clear complexion and rosy lips, the doctor, when he smiled with his pleasant, elegant air, disclosed thirty-two teeth of irreproachable whiteness, which seemed to combine the polish of ivory with the sharp durability of steel ; a forest of white hair, naturally curled, encircled the amiable and intelligent face of the doctor. Dressed always in black, with a certain affectation, he remained faithful to the tradition of small-clothes made of silk cloth, with shoe buckles of gold, and silk stockings, which clearly delineated his strong, sinewy legs.

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Doctor Gasterini was holding delicately between his thumb and his index finger — whose rosy polished nails might have been the envy of a pretty woman — the wrist of his patient, who religiously awaited the decision of his physician.

“ My dear abbé,” said the doctor, “ you are not at all sick.”

“ But, doctor — ”

“ You have a soft, pliant skin, and sixty-five pulsations to the minute. It would be impossible to find conditions of better health.”

“ But, again, doctor, I — ”

“ But, again, abbé, you are not sick. I am a good judge, perhaps.”

“ And I tell you, doctor, that I have not closed my eyes the whole night. Madame Siboulet, my house-keeper, has been on her feet constantly, — she gave me several times some drops made by the good sisters.”

“ Stuff ! ”

“ And orange flower distilled at the Sacred Heart.”

“ The devil ! ”

“ Yes, doctor, you may laugh ; none of these remedies have given me relief. I have done nothing but turn over and over all night long in my bed. Alas, alas ! I am not well. I have an excitement, an insupportable weariness.”

“ Perhaps, my dear abbé, you experienced yesterday some annoyance, some contradiction, and as you are very obstinate, very conceited, very spiteful — ”

“ I ? ”

“ You.”

“ Doctor, I assure you — ”

“ This annoyance, I tell you, might have put you in a diabolical humour ; for I know no remedy which can prevent these vexations. As to being ill, or even indisposed, you are not the least so in the world, my dear abbé.”

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“Then why did I ask you to come to see me this morning?”

“You ought to know that better than I, my dear abbé; nevertheless, I suspect the unusual motive which has made you desire my visit.”

“That is rather hard.”

“No, not very hard, for we are old acquaintances, and I know all your tricks, my dear abbé.”

“My tricks! — you know my tricks?”

“You contrive excellent ones, sometimes,—but to return to our subject, I believe that, under a pretext of sickness which really does not exist, you have sent for me to learn from me, directly or indirectly, something which is of interest to you.”

“Come, doctor, that is rather a disagreeable pleasantry.”

“Wait, my dear abbé. In my youth I was physician to the Duke d’Otrante, when he was minister of police. He enjoyed, like you, perfect health, yet there was scarcely a day that he did not exact a visit from me. I was unsophisticated then, and, although well equipped in my profession, I had need of patrons, so, notwithstanding my visits to his Excellency seemed unnecessary, I went to his house regularly every day, about the hour he made his toilet, and we conversed. The minister was very inquisitive, and as I was professionally thrown with persons of all conditions, he, with charming good nature, plied me with questions concerning my patients. I responded with all the sincerity of my soul. One day I arrived, as I have told you, at the minister’s house, when he had just completed his toilet, the very moment when a journeyman barber, the most uncleanly-looking knave I had ever seen in my life, had finished shaving him.

“‘M. duke,’ said I to the minister, after the barber had departed, ‘how is it that, instead of being shaved by one of your valets, you prefer the services of these

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frightful journeyman barbers whom you change almost every fortnight?"

"'My dear,' replied the duke in a confidential tone, "'you cannot imagine how much one can learn about all sorts of people and things, when one knows how to set such fellows as that prattling.' Was this confession an amusement or a blunder on the part of this great man, or, rather, did he think me too silly to comprehend the full significance of his words? I do not know; but I do know that this avowal enlightened me as to the real intention of his Excellency in having me chat with him so freely every morning. After that, I responded with much circumspection to the questions of the cunning chief, who knew so well how to put in practice the transcendent maxim, 'The best spies are those who are spies without knowing it.'"

"The anecdote is interesting, as are all that you tell, my dear doctor," replied the abbé, with repressed anger, "but I swear to you that your allusion is entirely inapplicable, and that, alas! I am very sick."

"Forty years yet of such illness, and you will become a centenarian, my dear abbé," said the doctor, rising and preparing to take his leave.

"Oh, what a man! what a man!" cried the abbé. "Do listen to me, doctor, you have a heart of bronze; can you abandon a poor sick man in this manner? Give me five minutes!"

"So be it; let us chat if you wish it, my dear abbé. I have a quarter of an hour at your disposal; you are a man of mind, I cannot better employ the time given to this visit."

"Ah, doctor, you are cruel!"

"If you wish a more agreeable physician, address some others of my fraternity. You will find them eager to give their attention to the celebrated preacher, Abbé Ledoux, the most fashionable director of the Faubourg St. Germain — for, in spite of the Republic, or, for

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reason of the Republic, there is more than ever a Faubourg St. Germain, and, under every possible administration, the protection of Abbé Ledoux would be a lofty one."

"No, doctor, I want no other physician than you, terrible man that you are! Just see the confidence you inspire in me. It seems to me your presence has already done me good, — it calms me."

"Poor dear abbé, what confidence! It is touching; that certainly proves that it is only faith which saves."

"Do not speak of faith," said the abbé, affecting anger pleasantly. "Be silent, you pagan, materialist, atheist, republican, for you are and have been all, at your pleasure."

"Oh, oh, abbé, what an array of fine words!"

"You deserve them, wicked man; you will be damned, do you hear? — more than damned!"

"God may will it that we may meet each other some day, my poor abbé."

"I, damned?"

"Eh, eh."

"Do I abandon myself as you do to the brutality of all my appetites? Go, — you are a perfect Sardanapalus!"

"Flatterer! but then it is your manner. You reproach an old Lovelace for the enormities of which he would like to be guilty, and in the meantime you know that he has none of them; but it is all the same, your reproaches delight him, they render him cheerful; then he confesses all sorts of sins, of which, alas! he is incapable, poor man, and you have the air of giving a last pretext to his decaying imbecility."

"Fie! fie! doctor, the serpent had no more malignity than you."

"You reproach the broken-down politician, the powerless man of state, not less furiously, for his dark intrigues to overthrow the political world, — Europe, perhaps.

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Then with what unction the poor man relishes your reproaches! Everybody flies him like a pest when he opens his mouth to bore them with his politics; but what good fortune for him to unveil to you his Machiavellian projects for the advantage of the destinies of Europe, and to find a patient listener to the ravings of his old age."

"Yes, yes, jest, jeer, ridicule, you rascally doctor! You wish to excuse yourself by reviling others."

"Let us see, abbé, let us make an examination of conscience. Our professions will be inverted; I, the physician for the body, am going to ask a consultation with you, the physician for the soul."

"And you will have precious need of this consultation."

"Of what do you accuse me, abbé?"

"In the first place, you are a glutton, like Vitellius, Lucullus, the Prince of Soubise, Talleyrand, D'Aigrefeuille, Cambacérès, and Brillat-Savarin all together."

"A flatterer always! You reproach me for my only great and lofty quality."

"Ah, come now, doctor, do you take me for an oyster with your frivolous talk?"

"Take you for an oyster? How concceited you are! Unfortunately, I cannot make a comparison so advantageous to you, abbé. It would be a heresy, an anachronism. Good oysters (and others are not counted as existing) do not give the right to discuss them until about the middle of November, and we are by no means there."

"This, doctor, may be very witty, but it does not convince me in the least that gluttony is, in you or any other person, a quality."

"I will convince you of it."

"You?"

"I, my dear abbé."

"That would be rather difficult. And how?"

GLUTTONY.

" Give me your evening on the twentieth of November and I will prove that — "

But interrupting himself, the doctor added :

" Come now, my dear abbé, what are you constantly looking at there by the side of that door ? "

The holy man, thus taken unawares, blushed to his ears, for he had listened to the doctor with distraction, impatiently turning his eyes toward the door as if he expected a person who had not arrived ; but after the first moment of surprise the abbé did not seem disconcerted, and replied :

" What door do you speak of, doctor ? I do not know what you mean."

" I mean that you frequently look on this side as if you expected the appearance of some one."

" There is no one in the world, dear doctor, except you, who could have such ideas. I was entirely absorbed in your sophistical but intelligent conversation."

" Ah, abbé, abbé, you overwhelm me ! "

" You wish, in a word, doctor, to prove to me that gluttony is a noble, sublime passion, do you not ? "

" Sublime, abbé, that is the word, sublime,— if not in itself at least in its consequences ; above all, in the interest of agriculture and commerce."

" Come, doctor, that is a paradox. Agriculture and commerce are sustained as other things are."

" It is not a paradox, it is a fact, yes, a fact, and if it is demonstrated to you positively, mathematically, practically, and economically, what can you say ? Will you still doubt it ? "

" I will doubt, or rather I will believe this abomination less than ever."

" How, in spite of evidence, abbé ? "

" Because of evidence, if so be that this evidence can ever exist, for it is by just such means of these pretended evidences, these perfidious appearances, that the bad spirit leads us into the most dangerous snares."

THE SEVEN CARDINAL SINS.

“What, abbé, the devil! I am not a seminarian whom you are preparing to take the bands. You are a man of mind and of knowledge. When I talk reason to you, talk reason to me, and not of the devil and his horns.”

“But, pagan, idolater that you are, do you not know that gluttony is perhaps the most abominable of the seven capital sins?”

“In the first place, abbé, I pray you do not calumniate like that the seven capital sins, but speak of them with the deference which is their due. I have found them profoundly respected in general and in particular.”

“Indeed, it is not only gluttony that he glorifies,—he pushes his paradox to the glorification of the seven capital sins!”

“Yes, dear abbé, all the seven, considered from a certain point of view.”

“That is monomania.”

“Will you be convinced, abbé?”

“Of what?”

“Of the possible excellence,—of the conditional existence of the worldly and philosophical excellence of the seven capital sins.”

“Really, doctor, do you take me for a child?”

“Give me your evening on the twentieth of November; you will be convinced.”

“Come now, doctor, why always the twentieth of November?”

“That is for me a prophetic day, and more, it is the anniversary of my birth, my dear abbé, so give me your evening on that day and you will not regret having come.”

“Very well, then, the twentieth of November, if my health —”

“Permits you,—well understood, my dear abbé; but my experience tells me that you will be able to drag yourself to see me on that day.”

GLUTTONY.

"What a man. He is capable of giving me a perfect example, in his own damned person, of the seven capital sins."

At this moment the door opened.

It was on this door, more than once, that the glances of Abbé Ledoux had been turned with secret and growing impatience, during his conversation with the doctor.

CHAPTER V.

THE abbé's housekeeper, having entered the chamber, handed a letter to her master, and, exchanging with him a look of intelligence, said :

“ It is very urgent, M. abbé.”

“ Permit me, doctor ? ” said the holy man, before breaking the seal of the letter he held in his hand.

“ At your convenience, my dear abbé,” replied the doctor, rising from his seat ; “ I must leave you now.”

“ I pray you, just a word ! ” cried the abbé, who seemed especially anxious that the doctor should not depart so soon. “ Give me time to glance over this letter, and I am at your service.”

“ But, abbé, we have nothing more to say to each other. I have an urgent consultation, and the hour is — ”

“ I implore you, doctor,” insisted the abbé, breaking the seal and running his eyes over the letter he had just received, “ in the name of Heaven, give me only five minutes, not more.”

Surprised at this singular persistence on the part of the abbé, the doctor hesitated to go out, when the invalid, discontinuing his reading of the letter, raised his eyes to heaven and exclaimed :

“ Ah, my God, my God ! ”

“ What is the matter ? ”

“ Ah, my poor doctor ! ”

“ Finish what you have to say.”

“ Ah, doctor, it was Providence that sent you here.”

“ Providence ! ”

GLUTTONY.

“Yes, because I find it in my power to render you a great service, perhaps.”

The physician appeared to be a little doubtful of the good-will of Abbé Ledoux, and accepted his words not without a secret distrust.

“Let us see, my dear abbé,” replied he, “what service can you render me?”.

“You have sometimes spoken to me of your sister’s numerous children, whom you have raised (notwithstanding your faults, wicked man) with paternal tenderness, after the early death of their parents.”

“Go on, abbé,” said the doctor, fixing a penetrating gaze on the saintly man, “go on.”

“I was altogether ignorant that one of your nephews served in the navy, and had been made captain. His name is Horace Brémont, is it not?”

At the name of Horace, the doctor started, imperceptibly; his gaze seemed to penetrate to the depth of the abbé’s heart, and he replied, coldly :

“I have a nephew who is captain in the navy and his name is Horace.”

“And he is now in Paris?”

“Or elsewhere, abbé.”

“For God’s sake, let us talk seriously, my dear doctor, the time is precious. See here what has been written to me and you will judge of the importance of the letter.

“‘M. ABBÉ: — I know that you are very intimate with the celebrated Doctor Gasterini; you can render him a great service. His nephew, Captain Horace, is compromised in a very disagreeable affair; although he has succeeded in hiding himself up to this time, his retreat has been discovered and perhaps, at the moment that I am writing to you, his person has been seized.’”

The abbé stopped and looked attentively at the doctor.
The doctor remained impulsive.

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Surprised at this indifference, the abbé said, in a pathetic tone :

“ Ah, my poor doctor, what cruel suffering for you ! But what has this unfortunate captain done ? ”

“ I know nothing about it, abbé, continue.”

Evidently the saintly man expected another result of the reading of his letter. However, not allowing himself to be disconcerted, he continued :

“ ‘Perhaps at this moment his person has been seized,’ ” repeated he, laying stress on these words, and going on with the letter. “ ‘ But there remains one chance of saving this young man who is more thoughtless than culpable ; you must, upon the reception of this letter, send some one immediately to Doctor Gasterini.’ ”

And, stopping again, the abbé added :

“ As I told you, doctor, Providence sent you here.”

“ It has never done anything else for my sake,” coldly replied the doctor. “ Go on, abbé.”

“ You must, upon the reception of this letter, send immediately to Doctor Gasterini,’ ” repeated the abbé, more and more surprised at the impossibility of the physician, and his indifference to the misfortune which threatened his nephew. “ ‘ The doctor must send some person in whom he has confidence, without losing a minute, to warn Captain Horace to leave his retreat. Perhaps in this way he may get the start of the officers about to arrest this unfortunate young man.’ ”

“ I need not say more to you, my dear doctor,” hastily added the abbé, throwing the letter on the bed. “ A minute’s delay may lose all. Run, quick, save this unhappy young man ! What ! You do not move ; you do not reply ! What are you thinking of, my poor doctor ? Why do you look at me with such a strange expression ? Did you not hear what has been written to me ? And it is underlined, too. ‘ He must go instantly, without losing a minute, to warn Captain Horace to leave his retreat.’ Really, doctor, I do not understand you.”

GLUTTONY.

“But I understand you perfectly, my dear abbé,” said the doctor, with sardonic calmness. “But, upon honour, this expedient is really not up to the height of your usual inventions ; you have done better than that, abbé, much better.”

“An expedient! My inventions!” replied the abbé, feigning amazement. “Come, doctor, you surely are not speaking seriously?”

“You have forgotten, dear abbé, that an old fox like me discovers a snare from afar.”

“Doctor,” replied the abbé, no longer able to conceal his violent anger, “you are at liberty to jest,—at liberty to let the time pass, and lose the opportunity of saving your nephew. I have warned you as a friend. Now, do as you please, I wash my hands of it.”

“So then, my dear abbé, you were and you are in the plot of those sanctimonious persons who desired to make a nun of Dolores Salcedo, for the purpose of getting possession of the property she would one day inherit from her uncle, the canon ?”

“Dolores Salcedo! Her uncle, the canon! Really, doctor, I do not know what you mean.”

“Ah! ah! you are in that pious plot! It is well to know it; it is always useful to recognise your adversaries, above all, when they are as clever as you are, dear abbé.”

“But, hear me, doctor, I swear to you—”

“Stop, abbé, let us play an open game. You sent for me this morning, that the pathetic epistle you have just read to me might arrive in my presence.”

“Doctor!” cried the abbé, “that is carrying distrust, suspicion, to a point which becomes — which becomes — permit me to say it to you —”

“Oh, by all means, — I permit you.”

“Well, which becomes outrageous in the last degree, doctor. Ah, truly,” added the abbé, with bitterness, “I was far from expecting that my eagerness

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to do you a kindness would be rewarded in such a manner."

"Zounds ! I know very well, my poor abbé, that you hoped your ingenious stratagem would have an entirely different result."

"Doctor, this is too much !"

"No, abbé, it is not enough. Now, listen to me. This is what you hoped, I say, from your ingenious stratagem : Frightened by the danger to which my nephew was exposed, I would thank you effusively for the means you offered me to save him, and would fly like an arrow to warn this poor fellow to leave his place of concealment."

"So, in fact, any other person in your place, doctor, would have done, but you take care not to act so reasonably. Surely, to speak the truth, you must be struck with frenzy and blindness."

"Alas ! abbé, it is the beginning of the punishment for my sins. But let us return to the consequences of your ingenious stratagem. According to your hope, then, I would fly like an arrow to save, as you advise, my nephew. My carriage is below. I would get in it, and have myself conveyed as rapidly as possible to the mysterious retreat of Captain Horace."

"Eh, without doubt, doctor, that is what you should have done some time ago."

"Now, do you know what would have happened, my poor abbé ?"

"You would have saved your nephew."

"I would have lost him, I would have betrayed him, I would have delivered him to his enemies,—and see how. I wager that at this very hour, while I am talking to you, there is, not far from here in the street, and even in sight of this house, a cab, to which a strong horse is hitched, and by a strange chance (unless you countermand your order) this cab would follow my carriage wherever it might go."

GLUTTONY.

The abbé turned scarlet, but replied :

“ I do not know what cab you are speaking of, doctor.”

“ In other words, my dear abbé, you have been seeking traces of my nephew in vain. In order to discover his retreat, you have had me followed in vain. Now, you hoped, by the sudden announcement of the danger he was running, to push me to the extremity of warning the captain. Your emissary below would have followed my carriage, so that, without knowing it, I, myself, would have disclosed the secret of my nephew’s hiding-place. Again, abbé, for any other than yourself, the invention was not a bad one, but you have accustomed your admirers — and permit me to include myself among them — to higher and bolder conceptions. Let us hope, then, that another time you will show yourself more worthy of yourself. Good-bye, and without bearing you any grudge, my dear abbé, I count on you for our pleasant evening the twentieth of November. Otherwise, I will come to remind you of your promise. Good-bye, again, my poor, dear abbé. Come, do not look so vexed, — so out of countenance ; console yourself for this little defeat by recalling your past triumphs.”

And with this derisive conclusion to his remarks, Doctor Gasterini left Abbé Ledoux.

“ You sing victory, old serpent ! ” cried the abbé, purple with anger and shaking his fist at the door by which the doctor went out. “ You are very arrogant, but you do not know that this morning even we have recaptured Dolores Salcedo, and your miserable nephew shall not escape us, for I am as cunning as you are, infernal doctor, and, as you say, I have more than one trick in my bag.”

The doctor, the subject of this imprecatory monologue, had concealed the disquietude he felt by the discovery he had just made. He knew Abbé Ledoux capable of taking a brilliant revenge, so as he descended the steps of the saintly man’s house, the doctor, before entering

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his carriage, looked cautiously on both sides of the street. As he expected, he saw a public cab about twenty steps from where he was standing. In this cab was a large man, wearing a brown overcoat. Walking up to the cab, the doctor, with a confidential air, said in a low voice to the large man :

“ My friend, you are posted there, are you not, to follow this open carriage with two horses, standing before the door, Number 17 ? ”

“ Sir,” said the man, hesitating, “ I do not know who you are, or why you — ”

“ Hush ! my friend,” replied the doctor, in a tone full of mystery, “ I have just left Abbé Ledoux ; the order of proceeding is changed ; the abbé expects you at once, to give you new orders, — quick, go, go ! ”

The fat man, reassured by the explicit directions given by the doctor, hesitated no longer, descended from his cab, and went in haste to see the Abbé Ledoux. When the doctor saw the door close upon the emissary of the abbé, feeling certain that he was not followed, he ordered his coachman to drive in haste to the Faubourg Poissonnière, for if he feared nothing for his nephew, he had reason enough for uneasiness since he had learned that Abbé Ledoux was concerned in this intrigue.

The doctor’s carriage had just entered one of the less frequented streets of the Faubourg Poissonnière, not far from the gate of the same name, when he perceived at a short distance quite a large assemblage in front of a modest-looking house. The doctor ordered his carriage to stop, descended from it, mingled with the crowd, and said to one of the men :

“ What is the matter there, sir ? ”

“ It seems, sir, they are taking back a stray dove to the dove-cote.”

“ A dove ! ”

“ Yes, or if you like it better, a young girl who escaped from a convent. The commissary of police

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arrived with his deputies, and a very fat man in a blue overcoat, who looked like a priest. He had the house opened. The fugitive was found there, and put into a carriage with the fat man in a blue overcoat. I have never seen any citizen ornamented with such a stomach."

Doctor Gasterini did not wait to hear more, but rushed through the crowd and imperatively rang the bell at the door of the little house of which we have spoken. A young servant, still pale with emotion, came to open it.

"Where is Madame Dupont?" asked the physician, impatiently.

"She is at home, sir. Oh, sir, if you only knew!"

The doctor made no reply; went through two apartments, and entered a bedchamber, where he found an aged woman, with a venerable-looking face full of sweetness.

"Ah, doctor, doctor!" cried Madame Dupont, bursting into tears, "what a misfortune, what a scandal, poor young girl!"

"I am grieved, my poor Madame Dupont, that the service you rendered me should have been followed by such disagreeable consequences."

"Oh, do not think it is that which afflicts, doctor. I owe you more than my life, since I owe you the life of my son; I do not think of complaining of a transient vexation, and I know you too well, in other things, to raise the least doubt as to the intentions which led you to ask me to give a temporary asylum to this young girl."

"By this time, my dear Madame Dupont, I can and I ought to tell you all. Here is the whole story in two words: I have a nephew, an indiscreet boy, but the bravest fellow in the world; he is captain in the marine service. In his last voyage from Cadiz to Bordeaux he took as passengers a Spanish canon and his niece. My nephew fell desperately in love with the niece, but by a series of events too long and too ridiculous to relate to

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you, the canon took the greatest aversion to my nephew, and informed him that he should never marry Dolores. The opposition exasperated the lovers; my devil of a nephew followed the canon to Paris, discovered the convent where the uncle had placed the young girl, put himself in correspondence with her, and eloped with her. Horace — that is his name — is an honest fellow, and, the elopement accomplished, he introduced Dolores to me and confessed all to me. While the marriage was pending, he besought me to place this young girl in a suitable house, since, for a thousand reasons, it was impossible for me to keep the child in my house after such an uproar. Then I thought of you, my good Madame Dupont."

"Ah, sir, I was certain that you acted nobly in that as you have always, and, besides, the short time that she was here Mlle. Dolores interested me exceedingly,— indeed I was already attached to her, and you can judge of my distress this morning when —"

"The commissary of police ordered the house to be opened; I know it. And the canon, Dom Diégo, accompanied him."

"Yes, sir, he was furious; he declared that he was acquainted with the French law; that it would not permit such things; that it was abduction of a minor, and that they were searching on all sides for your nephew."

"That is what I expected, and I exacted from my nephew, not only that he would not see Dolores again until all was arranged, but that he would keep himself concealed in order to escape the pursuit which I hoped to quiet. Now I do not know if I can succeed; the situation is grave. I have told Horace so, but the deed was done, and I confess I revolted against the thought of placing this poor Dolores myself in the hands of the canon, a kind of gluttonous, superstitious brute, from whom there is nothing to hope."

"Ah, doctor, I am now well enough acquainted with

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Mlle. Dolores to be sure that she will die of grief if she is left in that convent, and believe me, sir, in the scene of this morning, that which most distresses me is not the scandal of which my poor house has been the theatre, but the thought of the sad future which is perhaps reserved for that unhappy child. And now that I know all, doctor, I am all the more troubled in thinking of the grave consequences that this abduction may entail upon your nephew."

"I share your fears most keenly, my dear Madame Dupont. After a discovery that I have this morning made, I am afraid that a complaint has already been instituted against Horace ; if it has not been it will be, to-day perhaps, for now that Dolores is again in the power of her uncle, if he can have my nephew arrested he will have nothing to fear from his love for Dolores. Ah, this arrest would be dreadful ! Law is inflexible. My nephew went by night to a convent and abducted a minor. It is liable to infamous punishment, and for him that would be worse than death !"

"Great God !"

"And his brothers and sisters who love him so much ! What sorrow for me,— for our family !" added the old man, with sadness.

"But, sir, there ought to be something we can do to put a stop to this pursuit."

"Ah, madame, dear Madame Dupont," replied the doctor, overcome with emotion, "I lose my head when I think of the terrible consequences which may result from this foolish adventure of a young man."

"But what shall we do, doctor, what shall we do ?"

"Ah, do I know myself what to do, my poor Madame Dupont ? I am going to reflect on the best course to pursue, but I am dealing with such a powerful adversary that I dare not hope for success." And Doctor Gasterini left the Faubourg Poissonnière in a state of inexpressible anxiety.

CHAPTER VI.

THE day after Dolores Salcedo had been taken back to the convent, the following scene took place in the home of the canon, Dom Diégo, who lodged in a comfortable apartment engaged for him before his arrival by Abbé Ledoux.

It was eleven o'clock in the morning.

Dom Diégo, reclining in a large armchair, seemed to be assailed by gloomy thoughts. He was a large man of fifty years, and of enormous obesity; his fat, bloated cheeks mingled with his quadruple chin, his dingy skin was rough and flabby, and revealed the weakness of the inert mass. His features were not wanting in a kind of good-humour, when they were not under the domination of some disagreeable idea. His large mouth and thick, hanging under-lip denoted sensuality. With half-closed eyes under his heavy gray eyebrows, and hands crossed upon his Falstaff stomach, whose vast rotundity was outlined beneath a violet-coloured morning-gown, the canon sighed from time to time in a mournful and despondent tone.

"More appetite, alas! more appetite!" murmured he. "Too many tossings of the sea have upset me. My stomach, so stout, so regular in its habits, is distracted like a watch out of order. This morning, at breakfast, ordinarily my most enjoyable meal, I have hardly eaten at all. Everything seemed insipid or bitter. What will it be at dinner, oh, what will it be at dinner, a repast which I make almost always without hunger in order to take and taste the delicate flower of the best things?

GLUTTONY.

Ah, may that infernal Captain Horace be cursed and damned ! The horrible regimen to which I was subjected during that long voyage cost me my appetite ; my stomach was irritated and revolted against those execrable salt meats and abominable dry vegetables. So, since this injury done to the delicacy of its habits, my stomach pouts and treats me badly, as if it were my fault, alas ! It has a grudge against me, it punishes me, it looks big before the best dishes !

“ But who knows if the hand of Providence is not there ? Now that I do not feel the least hunger I realise that I have abandoned myself to a sin as detestable as — delectable. Alas ! gluttony ! Perhaps Providence meant to punish me by sending this miserable Captain Horace on my route. Ah, the scoundrel, what evil has he done ! And this was not enough ; he abducted my niece, he plunged me in new tribulations ; he upset my life, my repose. I, who only asked to eat with meditation and tranquillity ! Oh, this brigand captain ! I will have my revenge. But whatever may be my revenge, double traitor, I cannot return to you the twentieth part of the evil that I owe you. Because here are two months that I have lost my appetite, and if I should live one hundred years, I should never catch up with those two months of enforced abstinence ! ”

This dolorous monologue was interrupted by the entrance of the canon’s majordomo, an old servant with gray hair.

“ Well, Pablo,” said Dom Diégo to him, “ you come from the convent ? ”

“ Yes, sir.”

“ And my unworthy niece ? ”

“ Sir, she is in a sort of delirium, she has a hot fever ; sometimes she calls for Captain Horace with heartrending cries, sometimes she invokes death, weeping and sobbing. I assure you, sir, it is enough to break your heart.”

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Dom Diégo, in spite of his selfish sensuality, seemed at first touched by the majordomo's words, but soon he cried :

“ So much the better ! Dolores only has what she deserves. This will teach her to fall in love with the most detestable of men. She will remain in the convent, she shall take the veil there. My excellent friend and companion, Abbé Ledoux, is perfectly right ; by this sample of my niece's tricks I shall know what to expect, if I keep her near me, — perpetual alarms and insults until I had her married, well or ill. Now to cut short all this the Senora Dolores will take the veil, and accomplish her salvation ; my wealth will some day enrich the house, where they will pray for the repose of my soul, and I will be relieved of this she-devil of a niece, — three benefits for one.”

“ But, my lord, if the condition of the senora requires — ”

“ Not a word more, Pablo ! ” cried the canon, fearing he might be moved to pity in spite of himself. “ Not a word more. Have I not, alas ! enough personal troubles without your coming to torture me, to irritate me, with contradictions ? ”

“ Pardon, sir, then, I wish to speak to you of another thing.”

“ Of what ? ”

“ There is a man in the antechamber who desires to speak with you.”

“ Who is this man ? ”

“ An old man, well dressed.”

“ And what does this man want ? ”

“ To talk with you, sir, upon a very important affair. He has brought with him a large box that a porter has just delivered. It seems very heavy.”

“ And what is this box, Pablo ? ”

“ I do not know, sir.”

“ And the name of this man ? ”

GLUTTONY.

“ Oh, a very strange name.”

“ What ? ”

“ Appetite, sir.”

“ What ! this man’s name is Appetite ? ”

“ Yes, sir.”

“ You must have misunderstood him.”

“ No, sir, I made him repeat his name twice. It is certainly Appetite.”

“ Alas, alas ! what a cruelly ironical name ! ” murmured the canon, with bitterness. “ But no matter, for the rarity of the name, send this man in to me.”

An instant after the man announced by the major-domo entered, respectfully saluted Dom Diégo, and said to him :

“ It is Lord Dom Diégo whom I have the honour of addressing ? ”

“ Yes, what do you wish of me ? ”

“ First, sir, to pay you the tribute of my profound admiration ; then, to offer you my services.”

“ But, monsieur, what is your name ? ”

“ Appetite, sir.”

“ Do you write your name as appetite, the desire for food, is written ? ”

“ Yes, sir, but I confess that it is not my name, but my surname.”

“ To deserve such a surname you ought to be eminently well endowed by nature, M. Appetite ; you ought to enjoy an eternal hunger,” said the canon, with a sigh of regretful envy.

“ On the contrary, I eat very little, sir, as almost all those who have the sacred mission of making others eat.”

“ How ? What, then, is your profession ? ”

“ Cook, sir, and would like the honour of serving you, if I can merit that felicity.”

The canon shook his head sadly, and hid his face in his hands ; he felt all his griefs revive at the proposition of M. Appetite, who went on to say :

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“ My second master, Lord Wilmot, whose stomach was so debilitated that for almost a year he ate without pleasure, and even without knowing the taste of different dishes, literally devoured food the first day I had the honour of serving him. It was he who, through gratitude, gave me the name of Appetite, which I have kept ever since.”

The canon looked at his visitor attentively, and replied :

“ Ah, you are a cook ? But tell me, you have spoken to me of paying me the tribute of your admiration and of offering me your services, where were you acquainted with me ?”

“ You have, sir, during your sojourn in Madrid, often dined with the ambassador of France.”

“ Oh, yes, that was my good time,” replied Dom Diégo, with sadness. “ I rendered ample justice to the table of the ambassador of France, and I have proclaimed the fact that I knew of no better practitioner than his chef.”

“ And this illustrious practitioner, with whom, my lord, I am in correspondence, that we may mutually keep pace with the progress of the science, has written to me to express his joy at having been so worthily appreciated by a connoisseur like yourself. I had taken note of your name, and yesterday, learning by chance that you were in search of a cook, I come to have the honour of offering you my services.”

“ And from whom do you come, my friend ?”

“ For ten years, my lord, I have worked only for myself, that is to say, for art. I have a modest fortune, but enough, so it is not a mercenary motive which brings me to you, sir.”

“ But why do you offer your services to me, rather than to some one else ?”

“ Because, being free to choose, I consult my convenience ; because I am very jealous, my lord, horribly jealous.”

GLUTTONY.

“Jealous ; and of what ?”

“Of my master’s fidelity.”

“What, the fidelity of your master ?”

“Yes, my lord ; and I am sure you will be faithful, because you live alone, without family, and, by condition as well as character, you have not, like so many others, all sorts of inclinations which always bore or annoy one ; as a serious and convinced man, you have only one passion, but profound, absolute, and that is gluttony. Well, this passion, I offer, my lord, to satisfy, as you have never been satisfied in your life.”

“You talk of gold, my dear friend, but do you know that, to make good your claims, in the use of such extravagant language, you must have great talent, — prodigious talent ?”

“This great, this prodigious talent I have, my lord.”

“Your avowal is not modest.”

“It is sincere, and you know, sir, that one may employ a legitimate assurance, from the consciousness of his power.”

“I like this noble pride, my dear friend, and if your acts respond to your words, you are a superior person.”

“Sir, put me to trial to-day, this hour.”

“To-day, this hour !” cried the canon, shrugging his shoulders. “You do not know, then, that for two accursed months I have been in this deplorable state ; that there is nothing I can taste ; that this morning I have left untouched a breakfast ordered from Chevet, who supplies me until my kitchen is well appointed. Ah, if you did not have the appearance of an honest man, I would think you came to insult my misery, — proposing to cook for me when I am never the least hungry.”

“Sir, my name is Appetite.”

“But I repeat to you, my dear friend, that only an hour ago I refused the choicest things.”

“So much the better, my lord, I could not present my-

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self to you at a more favourable juncture ; my triumph will be great."

"Listen, my dear friend, I cannot tell you if it is the influence of your name, or the learned and exalted manner with which you speak of your art, which gives me confidence in you, in spite of myself ; but I experience, I will not say, a desire to eat, because I would challenge you to make me swallow the wing of an ortolan ; but indeed I experience, in hearing you reason upon cooking, a pleasure which makes me hope that perhaps, later, if appetite returns to me, I —"

"My lord, pardon me if I interrupt you ; you have a kitchen here ?"

"Certainly, with every appointment. A fire has just been kindled there to keep warm what was brought already prepared from Chevet, but, alas ! utterly useless."

"Will you give me, sir, a half-hour ?"

"What to do ?"

"To prepare a breakfast for you, sir."

"With what ?"

"I have brought all that is necessary."

"But what is the good of this breakfast, my dear friend ? Go, believe me, and do not compromise a talent in which I am pleased to believe, by engaging in a foolish, impossible undertaking."

"Sir, will you give me a half-hour ?"

"But I ask again, for what good ?"

"To make you eat an excellent breakfast, sir, which will predispose you for a still better dinner."

"That is folly, I tell you ; you are mad."

"Try, my lord ; what do you risk ?"

"Go on, then, you must be a magician."

"I am, sir, perhaps," replied the cook, with a strange smile.

"Very well, bear then the penalty of your own pride," cried Dom Diégo, ringing violently. "If you are instantly overwhelmed with humiliation, and are

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compelled to confess the impotence of your art, it is you who would have it. Take care, take care."

" You will eat, my lord," replied the artist, in a professional tone; " yes, you will eat, and much, and deliciously."

At the moment the cook pronounced these rash words the majordomo, called by the sound of the bell, entered.

" Pablo," said the canon, " open the kitchen to this man, and lay a cover for me. Justice must be done."

" But, sir, this morning — "

" Do as I tell you, conduct M. Appetite to the kitchen, and if he has need of help, let some one help him."

" I have need of no one, sir, I am accustomed to work alone in my laboratory. I ask of you permission to shut myself in."

" Have all that you wish, my dear friend, but may I be for ever damned for my sins if I swallow a mouthful of what you are going to serve me. I understand myself, I think, and there is really an overweening pride in you — "

" It is half-past eleven, my lord," said the cook, interrupting Dom Diégo, with majesty; " when the clock strikes noon you will breakfast."

And the artist went out, accompanied by the majordomo.

CHAPTER VII.

AFTER the disappearance of M. Appetite, this strange cook who offered his services with such superb assurance, the canon, left alone, said to himself, as he rose painfully from his chair and walked to and fro with agitation :

"The arrogant self-confidence of this cook confounds me and impresses me in spite of myself. But if he thinks he is dealing with a novice in the knowledge of dainty dishes, he has made a mistake, and I will make him see it. Well, what a fool I am to be so much disturbed ! Can any human power give me in five minutes the hunger that has failed me for two months ? Ah, that accursed Captain Horace ! What a pleasure it would be to me to put him under lock and key ! To think that the only nourishment he would have would be the nauseous diet given to prisoners, watered by a glass of blue wine, as rough to the throat as a rasp, and as sour as spoiled vinegar. But bah ! This scoundrel, accustomed, doubtless, to the frequent privations endured by mariners, is capable of being indifferent to such a martyrdom, and of preserving his insolent appetite, while I — Ah, if this cook has not told me a lie ! But, no, no, like all the French he is braggart, he is full of pride ! And yet his assurance seems to me conscientious. He has something, too, in his look, in his countenance, expressive of power. But, in fact, what is this man ? Where does he come from ? Can I trust myself to his sincerity ? I recall now that, when I spoke to him of the impossibility of reviving my appetite, he replied, with

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a significant bow : ‘ My lord, perhaps I am a magician.’ If there are magicians they are the sons of the evil spirit, and God keep me from ever meeting them ! This man must be a real magician if he makes me eat. Alas, I am a great sinner ! Satan takes all sorts of forms, and if — Oh, no, no, I shudder at the very thought ! I must turn away from such doleful meditations !’

Then, after a moment’s silence, the canon added, as he looked at his watch :

“ See, it will soon be noon. In spite of myself, the nearer the fatal hour comes, the more my anxiety increases. I feel a strange emotion, I can admit it to myself. I am almost afraid. It seems to me that this man at this very hour is surrendering himself to a mysterious incantation, that he is plotting something super-human, because to resurrect the dead and resurrect my appetite would be to work the same miracle. And this wonderful man has undertaken to work this miracle. And if he does, must I not recognise his supernatural power ? Come, come, I am ashamed of this weakness. Well, I am indifferent, I prefer not to be alone, because the nearer the hour the more uncomfortable I am. I must ring for Pablo. (He rings.) Yes, the silence of this dwelling, the thought that this strange man is there in that subterranean kitchen, bending over his blazing furnace, like some bad spirit occupied with his sorcery, — all that gives me a strange sensation. Ah, so Pablo does not hear ! ” cried the canon, now at the highest pitch of uneasiness.

And he rang the bell again, violently.

Pablo did not appear.

“ What does that mean ? ” murmured Dom Diégo, looking around him in dismay. “ Pablo does not come ! What a frightful and gloomy silence ! Oh, something wonderful is happening ! I dare not take a step.”

Turning his ear to listen, the canon added :

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“ What is that hollow sound ? Nothing human. Some one is coming. Ah, I have not a drop of blood in my veins ! ”

At this moment the door opened so violently that the canon screamed and hid his face in his hands, as he gasped the words :

“ *Vade — retro — Satanas !* ”

It was not Satan by any means, but Pablo, the majordomo, who, not having answered the two calls of the bell, was running precipitately, and thus produced the noise that the superstitious imagination of the canon transformed into something mysterious and supernatural.

The majordomo, struck with the attitude of the canon, approached him, and said :

“ Ah, my God, what is the matter with you, my lord ? ”

At the voice of Pablo, Dom Diégo dropped his fat hands, which covered his face, and his servant saw the terror depicted in the master’s countenance.

“ My lord, my lord, what has happened ? ”

“ Nothing, poor Pablo,—a foolish idea, which I am ashamed of now. But why are you so late ? ”

“ Sir, it is not my fault.”

“ How is that ? ”

“ I wished, sir, from curiosity, to enter this kitchen to see the work of this famous cook.”

“ Very well, Pablo ? ”

“ After I assisted him in carrying his box, this strange man ordered me out of the kitchen, where he wished, he said, to be absolutely alone.”

“ Ah, Pablo, how he surrounds himself with mystery ! ”

“ I obeyed, my lord, but I could not resist the temptation to stay outside at the door.”

“ To listen ? ”

“ No, sir, to scent.”

“ Well, Pablo ? ”

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“ Ah, my lord, my lord ! ”

“ What is it, Pablo ? ”

“ Little by little an odour passed through the door, so delicious, so exquisite, so tempting, so exciting, that it was impossible for me to go away. If I had been nailed to the door I could not have been more immovable. I was bewildered, fascinated, entranced ! ”

“ Truly, Pablo ? ”

“ You know, my lord, that you gave me the excellent breakfast they brought to you this morning.”

“ Alas ! yes.”

“ That breakfast I have eaten, my lord.”

“ Happy Pablo ! ”

“ Well, sir, this odour of which I tell you was so appetising that I felt myself seized with a furious hunger, and, without leaving the door, I took from one of the shelves of the pantry a large piece of dry bread.”

“ And you ate it, Pablo ? ”

“ I devoured it, my lord.”

“ Dry ? ”

“ Dry,” replied the majordomo, bowing his head.

“ Dry ! ” cried the canon, raising his hands and eyes to heaven. “ It is a miracle ! He breakfasted an hour ago like an ogre, and now he has just bolted a piece of dry bread ! ”

“ Yes, my lord, this dry bread, seasoned with that juicy odour, seemed to me the most delicious of morsels.”

At this moment the clock struck noon.

“ Noon ! ” cried the majordomo. “ This marvellous cook instructed me to serve you, my lord, at noon precisely. The cover is already laid on the little table. I am going to bring it.”

“ Go, Pablo,” said the canon, with a meditative air. “ My destiny is about to be accomplished. The miracle, if it is a miracle, is going to be performed,—if it is to be performed ; for I swear, in spite of all you have just told me, I have not the least appetite. I have a heavy

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stomach and a clammy mouth. Go, Pablo, I am waiting."

There was a resignation full of doubt, of curiosity, of anguish, and of vague hope, in the accent with which Dom Diégo uttered the words, "I am waiting."

Soon the majordomo reappeared.

He walked with a solemn air, bearing on a tray a little chafing-dish of silver, the size of a plate, surmounted with its stew-pan. On the side of the tray was a small crystal flagon, filled with a limpid liquid, the colour of burnt topaz.

Pablo, as he approached, several times held his nose to the edge of the stew-pan to inhale the appetising exhalations which escaped from it; finally, he placed on the table the little chafing-dish, the flagon, and a small card.

"Pablo," asked the canon, pointing to the chafing-dish, surmounted with its pan, "what is that silver plate?"

"It belongs to M. Appetite, sir; under this pan is a dish with a double bottom, filled with boiling water, because this great man says the food must be eaten burning hot."

"And that flagon, Pablo?"

"Its use is marked on the card, sir, which informs you of all the dishes you are going to eat."

"Let me see this card," said the canon, and he read:

"Guinea fowl eggs fried in the fat of quails, relieved with a gravy of crabs.

"N. B. Eat burning hot, make only one mouthful of each egg, after having softened it well with the gravy.

"Masticate *pianissimo*.

"Drink after each egg two fingers of Madeira wine of 1807, which has made five voyages from Rio Janeiro to Calcutta. (It is needless to say that certain wines are vastly improved by long voyages.)

"Drink this wine with meditation.

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“‘It is impossible for me not to take the liberty to accompany each dish which I have the honour of serving Lord Dom Diégo with a flagon of wine appropriate to the particular character of the aforesaid dish.’”

“What a man!” exclaimed the majordomo, with an expression of profound admiration, “he thinks of everything!”

The canon, whose agitation was increasing, lifted the top of the silver dish with a trembling hand.

Suddenly a delicious odour spread itself through the atmosphere. Pablo clasped his hands, dilating his wide nostrils and looking at the dish with a greedy eye.

In the middle of the silver dish, half steeped in an unctuous, velvety gravy of a beautiful rosy hue, the majordomo saw four little round soft eggs, that seemed still to tremble with their smoking, golden frying.

The canon, struck like his majordomo with the delicious fragrance of the dish, literally ate it with his eyes, and for the first time in two months a sudden desire of appetite tickled his palate. Nevertheless, he still doubted, believing in the deceitful illusion of a false hunger. Taking in a spoon one of the little eggs, well impregnated with gravy, he shovelled it into his large mouth.

“Masticate *pianissimo*, my lord!” cried Pablo, who followed every motion of his master with a beating heart. “Masticate slowly, the magician said, and afterward drink this, according to the directions.”

And Pablo poured out two fingers of the Madeira wine of 1807, in a glass as thin as the peel of an onion, and presented it to Dom Diégo.

Oh, wonder! Oh, marvel! Oh, miracle! The second movement of the mastication *pianissimo* was hardly accomplished when the canon threw his head gently back, and, half shutting his eyes in a sort of ecstasy, crossed his two hands on his breast, still holding in one hand the spoon with which he had just served himself.

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"Well, my lord?" said Pablo, with keen interest, as he presented the two fingers of Madeira wine, "well?"

The canon did not reply, but took the glass eagerly and carried it to his lips.

"Above all, sir, drink with meditation," cried Pablo, a scrupulous observer of the cook's order.

The canon drank, indeed, with meditation, then clapped his tongue against his palate, and, if that can be said, listened an instant to relish the flower of the wine which mingled so marvellously with the after-taste of the dish he had just tasted; then, without replying to the interrogations of Pablo, he ate *pianissimo* the three last Guinea fowl eggs, with a pensive and increasing delectation, emptied the little flagon of Madeira wine, and,—must we confess the dreadful impropriety?—he actually dipped his bread so scrupulously into every drop of the crab gravy in which the eggs were served that the bottom of the silver dish soon shone with an immaculate lustre.

Then addressing his majordomo for the first time, Dom Diégo exclaimed, in a tender voice, while tears glittered in his eyes:

"Ah, Pablo!"

"What is the matter, my lord? This emotion—"'

"Pablo, I do not know who it is has said that great joys have something melancholy in them; whoever did say it has not made a mistake, because, from the infirmity of our nature, we often sink under the weight of the greatest felicities. Now, for the first time in two months, I can really say I eat, and I eat as I have never eaten in my life. No, no, human language, you must see, my dear Pablo, cannot express the luxury, the exquisite delicacy of this dish, so simple in appearance, Guinea fowl eggs fried in the fat of quail, watered with gravy of crabs. No, for you see, in proportion as I relish them I felt my appetite renew itself, and at present I am much more hungry than before I ate. And this wine, Pablo, this wine, how it melts in the mouth, hey?"'

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“ Alas ! my lord,” said the majordomo, with a woeful face, “ I do not know even the taste of this wine, but I am glad to believe you.”

“ Oh, yes, believe me, my poor Pablo ; it is dry and velvety at the same time, — what shall I say ? a nectar ! and if you only knew, Pablo, how admirably the flavour of this nectar mingles with the perfume of the crab gravy ! It is ideal, Pablo, ideal, I tell you, and I ought to be radiant, crazy with joy in the recovery of my lost appetite, — well, no, I feel myself overcome with an inexpressible tenderness ; in fact, I weep like a child ! Pablo, do you see it ? I am weeping, I am hungry ! ”

A bell sounded.

“ What is that, Pablo ? ”

“ It is he, my lord.”

“ Who ? ”

“ The great man ! he is ringing for us.”

“ He ? ”

“ Yes, my lord,” replied Pablo, removing the dish. “ He declares that those who eat should be at the call of those who prepare their food, for only the latter know the hour, the minute, the instant each dish ought to be served and tasted so as not to lose one atom of its worth.”

“ What he has said is very deep ! He is right. Run, then, Pablo. My God ! he is ringing again ! I hope he has not taken offence. Go quick, quick ! ”

The majordomo ran, and, let us confess the impropriety, the poor creature, instigated by a consuming curiosity, dared to lick the dish he carried with desperate greediness, although the canon had left it absolutely clean. The ever increasing impatience with which the canon looked for the different dishes, always unknown to him beforehand, can be imagined.

Each service was accompanied with an “ order,” as Pablo called it, and a new flagon of wine, drawn, no doubt, from the cellar of this wonderful cook.

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A collection of these culinary bulletins will give an idea of the varied delights enjoyed by Dom Diégo.

After the note which announced the Guinea fowl eggs, the following menu was served, in the order in which we present it :

“ Trout from the lake of Geneva with Montpellier butter, preserved in ice.

“ Envelope each mouthful of this exquisite fish, hermetically, in a layer of this highly spiced seasoning.

“ Masticate *allegro*.

“ Drink two glasses of this Bordeaux wine, Sauterne of 1834, which has made the voyage from the Indies three times.

“ This wine should be *meditated*.”

“ A painter or a poet would have made an enchanting picture of this trout with Montpellier butter preserved in ice,” said the canon to Pablo. “ See there, this charming little trout, with flesh the colour of a rose, and a head like mother-of-pearl, voluptuously lying on this bed of shining green, composed of fresh butter and virgin oil congealed by ice, to which tarragon, chive, parsley, and water-cresses have given this bright emerald colour! And what perfume! How the freshness of this seasoning contrasts with the pungency of the spices which relieve it! How delicious! And this wine of Sauterne! As the great man of the kitchen says, how admirably this ambrosia is suited to the character of this divine trout which gives me a growing appetite! ”

After the trout came another dish, accompanied with this bulletin :

“ Fillets of grouse with white Piedmont truffles, minced raw.

“ Enclose each mouthful of grouse between two slices of truffle, and moisten the whole well with sauce à la Perigueux, with which black truffles are mingled.

“ Masticate *forte*, as the white truffles are raw.

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“ Drink two glasses of this wine of Château-Margaux 1834,— it also has made a voyage from the Indies.

“ This wine reveals itself in all its majesty only in the after-taste.”

These fillets of grouse, far from appeasing the growing appetite of the canon, excited it to violent hunger, and, in spite of the profound respect which the orders of the great man had inspired in him, he sent Pablo, before another ringing of the bell, in search of a new culinary wonder.

Finally the bell sounded.

The majordomo returned with this note, which accompanied another dish :

“ Salt marsh rails roasted on toast à la Sardanapalus.

“ Eat only the legs and rump of the rails; do not cut the leg, take it by the foot, sprinkle it lightly with salt, then cut it off just above the foot, and chew the flesh and the bone.

“ Masticate *largo* and *fortissime*; eat at the same time a mouthful of the hot toast, coated over with an unctuous condiment made of the combination of snipe liver and brains and fat livers of Strasburg, roebuck marrow, pounded anchovy, and pungent spices.

“ Drink two glasses of Clos Vougeot of 1817.

“ Pour out this wine with emotion, drink it with religion.”

After this roast, worthy of Lucullus or Trimalcyon, and enjoyed by the canon with all the intensity of unsatisfied hunger, the majordomo reappeared with two side-dishes that the menu announced thus :

“ Mushrooms with delicate herbs and the essence of ham; let this divine mushroom soften and dissolve in the mouth.

“ Masticate *pianissimo*.

“ Drink a glass of the wine Côte-Rôtie 1829, and a glass of Johannisberg of 1729, drawn from the municipal vats of the burgomasters of Heidelberg.

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“ No recommendation to make for the advantage of the wine, Côte-Rôtie ; it is a proud, imperious wine, it asserts itself. As for the old Johannisberg, one hundred and forty years old, approach it with the veneration which a centenarian inspires ; drink it with compunction.

“ Two sweet side-dishes.

“ Morsels à la duchesse with pineapple jelly.

“ Masticate *amoroso*.

“ Drink two or three glasses of champagne dipped in ice, dry Sillery the year of the comet.

“ Dessert.

“ Cheese from Brie made on the farm of Estonville, near Meaux. This house had for forty years the honour of serving the palate of Prince Talleyrand, who pronounced the cheese of Brie the king of cheeses,—the only royalty to which this great diplomatist remained faithful unto death.

“ Drink a glass or two of Port wine drawn from a hogshead recovered from the great earthquake of Lisbon.

“ Bless Providence for this miraculous salvage, and empty your glass piously.

“ N. B. Never fruits in the morning ; they chill, burden, and involve the stomach at the expense of the repose of the evening ; simply rinse the mouth with a glass of cream from the Barbadoes of Madame Amphoux, 1780, and take a light siesta, dreaming of dinner.”

It is needless to say that all the prescriptions of the cook were followed literally by the canon, whose appetite, now a prodigious thing, seemed to increase in proportion as it was fed ; finally, having exhausted his glass to the last drop, Dom Diégo, his ears searlet, his eyes softly closed, and his cheeks flushed, commenced to feel the tepid moisture and light torpor of a happy and easy digestion ; then, sinking into his armchair with a delicious languor, he said to his majordomo :

“ If I were not conscious of a tiger’s hunger, which

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threatens explosion too soon, I would believe myself in Paradise. So, Pablo, go at once for this great man of the kitchen, this veritable magician ; tell him to come and enjoy his work ; tell him to come and judge of the ineffable beatitude in which he has plunged me, and above all, Pablo, tell him that if I do not go myself to testify my admiration, my gratitude, it is because—”

The canon was interrupted by the sight of the culinary artist, who suddenly entered the room, and stood face to face with Diégo, staring at him with a strange expression of countenance.

CHAPTER VIII.

AT the sight of the cook, who wore, according to the habit of his profession, a white vest and a cotton cap,—the ancient and highly classic schools of Laguipierre, Morel, and Carême remained faithful to the cotton cap, the young romantic school adopting the toque of white muslin,— Canon Dom Diégo rose painfully from his arm-chair, made two steps toward the culinary artist, with his hands extended, and cried, in a voice full of emotion :

“ Welcome, my saviour, my friend, my dear friend ! Yes, I am proud to give you this title ; you have deserved it, because I owe you my appetite, and appetite is happiness,— it is life ! ”

The cook did not appear extremely grateful for the friendly title with which the canon had honoured him ; he remained silent, his arms crossed on his breast, and his gaze fixed on Dom Diégo, but the latter, in the fiery ardour of gastronomic gratitude, did not observe the sardonic smile,— we would almost say Satanic smile,— which played upon the lips of the great man of the kitchen, and so continued the expression of his gratitude :

“ My friend,” pursued the canon, “ from this day you are mine ; your conditions will be mine. I am rich ; good cheer is my only passion, and for you I will not be a master, but an admirer. Never, my friend, never, have you been better appreciated. You have told me yourself you work only for art, and you prove it, for I declare openly you are the greatest master cook of the world. The miracle that you have wrought to-day, not

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only in restoring my appetite, but in increasing it as I tasted your masterpieces (even at this hour I feel able to enjoy another breakfast), this miracle, I say, places you outside of the line of ordinary cooks. We will never part, my dear friend ; all that you ask I will grant ; you can take other assistants, other subalterns, if you desire to do so. I wish to spare you all fatigue ; your health is too precious to me to permit you to compromise it, for henceforth, — I feel it there,” and Dom Diègo put his fat hand on his stomach, — “henceforth, I shall not know how to live without you, and — ”

“ So,” cried the cook, interrupting the canon, and smiling with a sarcastic air, “ so you have breakfasted well, my lord canon ? ”

“ Have I breakfasted well, my dear friend ! Let me tell you I owe you the enjoyment of an hour and a quarter. An inexpressible enjoyment, without intermission except when your services were interrupted, and these intermissions were filled with delight. Hovering between hope and remembrance, was I not expecting new pleasures with an insatiable longing ? You ask me if I have breakfasted well ! Pablo will tell you that I have wept with tenderness. That is my reply.”

“ I have been permitted, my lord, to send you some wines as accompaniments, because good dishes without good wines are like a beautiful woman without soul. Now, have you found these wines palatable, my lord ? ”

“ Palatable ! Great God, what blasphemy ! Inestimable samples of all known nectars — palatable ! Wines whose value could not be paid, if you exchanged them, bottle for bottle, with liquid gold — palatable ! Come now, my dear friend, your modesty is exaggerated, as you seemed a moment ago to exaggerate your immense talent. But I recognise the fact that, if your genius should be boasted to hyperbole, there would still remain more than half untold.”

“ I have still more wine of this quality,” said the

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cook, coldly ; “ for twenty-five years I have been preparing a tolerable cellar for myself.”

“ But this tolerable cellar, my dear friend, must have cost you millions ? ”

“ It has cost me nothing, my lord.”

“ Nothing.”

“ They are all so many gifts to my humble merit.”

“ I am by no means astonished, my dear friend, but what are you going to do with this cellar, which is rich enough to be the envy of a king ? Ah, if you desired to surrender to me the whole, or a part of it, I would not hesitate to make any sacrifice for its possession ; because, as you have just said with so much significance, good dishes without good wines are like a beautiful woman without soul. Now, these wines accompany your productions so admirably that — I — ”

The cook interrupted Dom Diégo with a sarcastic, sneering laugh.

“ You laugh, my friend ? ” said the canon, greatly surprised. “ You laugh ? ”

“ Yes, my lord, I laugh.”

“ And at what, my friend ? ”

“ At your gratitude to me, my lord canon.”

“ My friend, I do not understand you.”

“ Ah, Lord Dom Diégo ! you believe that your good angel — and I picture him to myself, fat and chubby, dressed as I am, like a cook, and wearing pheasant wings on the back of his white robe ! — ah, you believe, I say, my lord canon, that your good angel has sent me to you ! ”

“ My dear friend,” said Dom Diégo, stretching his large eyes, and feeling very uncomfortable on account of the cook’s sardonic humour, “ my dear friend, I pray you, explain yourself clearly.”

“ My lord canon, this day will prove a fatal one for you.”

“ Great God ! what do you say ? ”

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"My lord canon!" replied the cook, his arms crossed and his eyes fixed in a threatening manner on the canon.

And he took a step toward Dom Diégo, who recoiled from him with an expression of pain.

"My lord canon, look at me well."

"I—I am looking at you," stammered Dom Diégo, "but—"

"My lord canon, my face shall pursue you everywhere, in your sleep and in your waking hours! You shall see me always before you, with my cotton cap and white jacket, like a terrible and fantastic apparition."

"Ah, my God! it is all up with me!" murmured the canon, terrified. "My presentiments did not deceive me; this appetite was too miraculous, these dishes, these wines, too supernatural not to have some awful mystery, some infernal magic in them."

Just at this critical moment the canon fortunately saw his majordomo enter.

"My lord," said Pablo, "the lawyer has just arrived; you know the lawyer who—"

"Pablo, stop there!" cried Dom Diégo, seizing his majordomo by the arm and drawing him near to himself. "Do not leave me."

"My God, sir! what is the matter?" said Pablo. "You seem to be frightened."

"Ah, Pablo, if you only knew," said Dom Diégo, in a low, whining voice, without daring to turn his eyes away from the cook.

"My lord," replied Pablo, "I told you the lawyer had arrived."

"What lawyer, Pablo?"

"The one who comes to draw up in legal form your demand for the arrest of Captain Horace, guilty of the abduction of Senora Dolores."

"Pablo, it is impossible to occupy myself now with business. I have no head—I must be dreaming. Ah,

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if you only knew what had happened ! This cook — oh, my presentiments ! ”

“ Then, my lord, I am going to send the lawyer away.”

“ No ! ” cried the canon, “ no, it is this miserable Captain Horace who is the cause of all my ills. If he had not destroyed my appetite, I should have already break-fasted this morning when this tempter in a white jacket introduced himself here, and I would not have been the victim of his sorcery. No,” added Dom Diégo, in a paroxysm of anger, “ tell this lawyer to wait ; he shall write my complaint this very hour. But first let me get out of this awful perplexity,” added he, throwing a frightened glance at the silent and formidable cook. “ I must know what this mysterious being wants of me to terrify me so. Tell the lawyer to enter my study, and do not leave me, Pablo.”

The majordomo went to say a few words outside of the door to the lawyer, who entered an adjacent room, and the canon, the majordomo, and the cook remained alone.

Dom Diégo, encouraged by the presence of Pablo, tried to reassure himself, and said to the man in the white jacket, who still preserved his unruffled and sardonic demeanour :

“ See, my good friend, let us talk seriously. It is neither a question of good or of bad angels, but of a man who possesses tremendous talent,—I am speaking of you,—whom I would like to attach to my household at whatever price it may cost. We were discussing the cellar of divine wines, for the acquisition of which I would esteem no sacrifice too much. I speak to you with all the sincerity of my soul, my dear and good friend ; reply to me in the same way.”

Then the canon whispered to his majordomo :

“ Pablo, do you stand between him and me.”

“ Then,” replied the cook, “ I will speak to you with

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equal sincerity, my lord canon, and first, let me repeat, I will be the desolation, the despair of your life."

" You ?"

" I."

" Pablo, do you hear him ? What have I done to him ? My God !" murmured Dom Diégo, " what grudge has he ?"

" Remember well my words, my lord canon. In comparison with the marvellous repast I have served you, the best dishes will seem insipid, the best wines bitter, and your appetite, awakened a moment by my power, will be again destroyed when I am no longer there to resurrect it."

" But, my friend," cried the canon, " you are thinking then of — "

The man in the cotton cap and white jacket again interrupted the canon and said :

" In recalling the delicacies which I have made you enjoy a moment, you will be like the fallen angels, who recall the celestial joys of paradise only to regret them in the midst of lamentation and gnashing of teeth."

" My good friend, I pray you one word ! "

" You will gnash your teeth, canon !" cried the cook, in a solemn voice, which sounded in the depths of Dom Diégo's soul like the blast of the trumpet of the last judgment. " You will be as a soul,—no, you have no soul, you will be like a stomach, scenting, hunting, touching all the choicest dishes that can be served, and crying with terrible groanings as you recall this morning's breakfast : ' Alas ! alas ! my appetite has passed like a shadow ; those exquisite dishes I will taste no more ! alas ! alas ! ' Then in your despair you will become lean,—do you hear me, canon ?—you will become lean."

" Great God ! Pablo, what is this wretched man saying ? "

" Until the present, in spite of your loss of appetite, you have lived upon your fat, like rats in winter, but

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henceforth you will suffer the double and terrible blow of the loss of appetite and the ceaseless regrets that I will leave to you. You will become lean, canon, yes, your cheeks will be flabby, your triple chin will melt like wax in the sun, your enormous stomach will become flat like a leather bottle exhausted of its contents, your complexion, so radiant to-day, will grow yellow under the constant flow of your tears, and you will become lean, scraggy, and livid as an anchorite living on roots and water,—do you hear, canon?"

"Pablo," murmured Dom Diégo, shutting his eyes, and leaning on his majordomo, "support me. I feel as if I were struck with death. It seems to me I see my own ghost, such as this demon portrays. Yes, Pablo, I see myself lean, scraggy, livid. Oh, my God! it is frightful! it is horrible! It is the divine punishment for my sin of gluttony."

"My lord, calm yourself," said the majordomo.

And addressing the cook with mingled fear and anger, he said :

"Do you undertake to tyrannise over such an excellent and venerable a man as the Lord Dom Diégo?"

"And now," continued the cook, pitilessly, "farewell, canon, farewell for ever."

"Farewell, farewell for ever," cried Dom Diégo, with a violent start, as if he had received an electric shock. "What! can it be true? you will abandon me for ever. Oh, no, no, I see all now: in making me regret your loss so deeply, you wish to put your services at a higher price. Well, then, speak, how much must you have?"

"Ah, ah, ah, ah!" shouted the man with the cotton cap and white jacket, bursting into Mephistophelian laughter, and walking slowly toward the door.

"No, no," cried the canon, clasping his hands; "no, you will not abandon me thus,—it would be atrocious. it would be savage, it would be to leave an unfortuna"

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traveller in the middle of a burning desert, after having given him the delight of an oasis full of shade and freshness."

"You ought to have been a great preacher in your time, canon," said the man in the white jacket, continuing his march toward the door.

"Mercy, mercy!" cried Dom Diégo, in a voice choked with tears. "Ah, indeed, it is no longer the artist, the cook of genius with whom I plead; it is the man,—it is to one like myself that I bend the knee,—oh, see me, and beseech him not to leave a brother in hopeless woe."

"Yes, and see me at your knees, too, my lord cook!" cried the worthy majordomo, excited by the emotion of his master, and like him, falling on his knees; "a very humble poor creature joins his prayer to that of the Lord Dom Diégo. Alas! do not abandon him, he will die!"

"Yes," replied the cook, with a Satanic burst of laughter, "he will die, and he will die lean."

The last sarcasm changed the despair of Dom Diégo to fury. He rose quickly, and, notwithstanding his obesity, threw himself upon the cook, crying:

"Come to me, Pablo; the monster shall not cook for anybody, his death only can deliver me from his infernal persecution!"

"My lord," cried the majordomo, less excited than his master, "what are you doing? Grief makes you wild."

Fortunately, the man in the white jacket, at the first aggressive movement of Dom Diégo, recoiled two steps, and put himself in a defensive attitude by means of a large kitchen knife which he brandished in one hand, while in the other he held a sharp larding-pin.

At the sight of the formidable knife and larding-pin, drawn like a dagger, the murderous exasperation of the canon was dispelled; but the violence of his emotions,

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the heat of his blood, and the state of his digestion produced such a revolution that he tottered and fell unconscious in the arms of the majordomo, who, too weak to sustain such a weight, himself sank to the floor, screaming with all his strength :

“ Help ! help !”

Then the man in the white jacket disappeared, with a last resounding burst of laughter which would have done honour to Satan himself, and terrified the majordomo almost to death.

CHAPTER IX.

MANY days had elapsed since the canon, Dom Diégo, had been so mercilessly abandoned by the strange and inimitable cook of whom we have spoken.

In the home of the Abbé Ledoux, the following scene occurred between him and the canon.

The threatening predictions of the great cook were beginning to be realised. Dom Diégo, pale, dejected, with a complexion yellowed by abstinence,—for all dishes seemed to him tasteless and nauseating since the marvellous breakfast of which he constantly dreamed,—would scarcely have been recognised. His enormous stomach had already lost its rotundity, and the poor man, whose physiognomy and attitude betrayed abject misery, responded in a mournful tone to the questions of the abbé, who, walking up and down the parlour in the greatest agitation, addressed him in a rude and angry tone :

“ In truth, you have not the least energy, Dom Diégo ; you have fallen into a desperate state of apathy.”

“ That is easy for you to say,” murmured the canon, in a grieved tone. “ I would like very much to see you in my place, alas ! ”

“ Oh, come now, this is shameful ! ”

“ Abuse me, abbé, curse me ; but what do you want ? Since this accursed man has abandoned me I live no longer, I eat no longer, I sleep no longer ! Ah, he well said, ‘ My memory and my face will pursue you everywhere, canon ! ’ In fact, I am always thinking of the Guinea fowl eggs, the trout, and the roast à la Sardana-

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palus. And he, I see him always and everywhere in his white jacket and cotton cap. It is like a hallucination. To-night, even, yielding myself to a feverish, nervous slumber, I dreamed of this demon."

"Better and better, canon."

"What a nightmare! My God! what a horrible nightmare! He had served me with one of those exquisite, divine dishes, which he alone has the genius to produce, and he said to me, with his sardonic air, 'Eat, canon, eat.' It was, I recollect,—I see it still,—a delicious reed-bird with orange sauce. I had a devouring appetite; I took my knife and fork to carve the adorable little bird; I was carving it into slices, golden outside and rosy within, and veined with such fine, delicate fat. A thousand little drops of rosy juice appeared on the flesh, like so many drops of dew, to such a point was it roasted. I steeped it in several spoonfuls of orange sauce whose flavour tickled my palate, before I tasted it. I took on the end of my fork a royal mouthful; I opened my mouth. Suddenly the ferocious laughter of my executioner resounded, and horror! I had on the end of my fork only a great piece of rancid, glutinous, infected yellow bacon. 'Eat, canon, why do you not eat?' repeated this accursed man, in his strident voice. 'Why do you not eat?' And in spite of myself, in spite of my terrible repugnance, I ate! Yes, abbé, I ate this disgusting bacon. Oh, when I think of it,—bah! it was horrible. And I awoke, bathed in tears. Night before last another odious dream. It was about eel-pout livers, and —"

"Go to the devil, canon!" cried the abbé, already provoked by this recital of Dom Diégo's gastronomic nightmare, "you are enough to damn a saint with your maudlin prattle."

"Prattle!" cried the canon, in despair. "What! here for eight days I have been able to swallow only a few spoonfuls of chocolate,—so faint, so disheartened

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am I. What! I have had the fortitude to pass two hours seated in the museums of Chevet and Bontoux, those famous cooks, hoping that perhaps the sight of their rare collections of comestibles would excite in me some desire of appetite,— and nothing, nothing. No, the recollection of that celestial breakfast was there, always there, annihilating everything by the sole power of a cherished memory. Ah, abbé, abbé, I have never loved, but since these three days I comprehend all that is exclusive in love; I comprehend how a man passionately in love remains indifferent to the sight of the most beautiful creature in the world, dreaming, alas!— three times alas!— only of the adored object which he regrets."

"But, canon," said the abbé, looking at Dom Diégo with anxiety, "do you know that all this will result in delirium — in insanity?"

"Eh, my God! I know it well, abbé, I am losing my head. This cursed seducer has carried away my life and thought with him. In the street, I gaze into the faces of all who pass, in the hope of meeting him. Great God! if this good luck would only happen! Oh, he would not be insensible to my prayers. 'Cruel, perfidious man,' I would say, 'look at me. See on my features the mark of my sufferings! Will you be without pity? No, no; mercy, mercy!'"

And the canon, falling back in his armchair, covered his face with his hands and burst into sobs.

"My God! my God! how wretched I am!" he cried.

"What a double brute! He will be a fool, if he is not one already," said the abbé to himself. "I will not complain of it, because, his insanity once established, he will not leave our house, and whether it is he or his niece little matters."

The abbé approached the canon with compunction, and said to him, gently:

"Come, my brother, be reasonable, calm yourself,

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perhaps we ought to see in what has happened the punishment of Heaven."

"I think with you, abbé, this tempter came from hell. It is not given to any human being to be such a cook. Ah, abbé, I must be a great sinner, for my punishment is terrible!"

"You have indeed surrendered yourself, without measure, without restraint, to one of the foulest of the capital sins,—gluttony, my dear brother,—and I repeat to you Heaven punishes you, as is its law, in the very thing by which you have sinned."

"But after all, what is my crime? I have simply used the admirable gifts of the Creator, for in fact it is not I who, in order to enjoy them, have created pheasants, ortolans, fat livers, salmon trout, truffles, oysters, lobsters, wines, and—"

"My brother, my brother!" cried the abbé, interrupting this appetising enumeration, "your words savour of materialism, pantheism, heresy! You are not in a state of mind to listen to me as I refute these impious, abominable systems which lead directly to paganism. But there is one indisputable fact, which is, that you suffer, my brother, you suffer cruelly; it is for us to bind up your wounds, my tender brother, it is for us to comfort them with balm and honey."

At these words the canon made an involuntary grimace, because, in his gastronomic monomania, the idea of honey and balm was especially distasteful.

The abbé continued :

"Let us see, my dear brother, let us return to the cause of all your ills."

"Alas! abbé, it is the loss of my appetite."

"Be it so, my brother, and who has caused the loss of your appetite?"

"That wretch!" cried the canon, irritated, "that infamous Captain Horace."

"That is true; well, I will always preach to you the

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forgiveness of injuries, my dear brother ; but, too, I must recommend to you an inexorable severity against sacrilege."

" What sacrilege, abbé ? "

" Have not Captain Horace and one of his sailors dared to leap over the sacred walls of the convent where you had shut up your niece ? Have they not had the audacity to carry away the miserable girl, whom happily we have recaptured ? This enormity in other times might have been punished with fire, and one day it will be punished with eternal fire."

" And this villain of a captain will only have what he deserves," cried Dom Diégo, ferociously ; " yes, he will cook — he will roast on Satan's spit by a slow fire, all eternity, where he will be moistened with gravy of melted lead, after having been larded with red-hot iron. Such will be his punishment, I earnestly hope."

" So may it be, but while waiting this eternal expiation, why not punish him here below ? Why have you had the culpable weakness to give up your demand for the arrest of this miscreant ? I need not remind you that this man is the first cause of all that you call your ills, — that is, the loss of your appetite."

" That is true, he is a great criminal."

" Then, my brother, why, I ask again, have you been so weak as to renounce your pursuit of him ? You do not reply, you seem to be embarrassed."

" It is that — "

" It is what ? "

" Alas, abbé, you are going to scold me, to lecture me again."

" Explain yourself, my brother."

" What shall I say ? It is his fault, for, since he has disappeared, all my thoughts come from him and return to him."

" Who, he ? "

" This angel or this demon."

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“ What angel — what demon ?”

“ The cook.”

“ Again the cook ?”

“ Always !”

“ Come,” said the abbé, shrugging his shoulders, “ do explain yourself, my brother.”

“ Well, then, abbé, know that the day after the fatal day when I breakfasted as I shall never breakfast again, alas ! when my despair was at its height, I received a mysterious note.”

“ And what did this contain, my brother ?”

“ Here it is.”

“ You have kept it.”

“ It is perhaps his cherished handwriting,” murmured the canon, with a melancholy accent.

And he handed the note to Abbé Ledoux, who read as follows :

“ MY LORD CANON :— There remains perhaps one means of seeing me again.

“ You now know the delights with which I am able to surfeit you.

“ You also know the terrible torments which my absence inflicts.

“ Before yesterday, not having felt these torments in all their anguish, you presumed to refuse what I expected of you.

“ To-day, as past sufferings will be a guarantee for the sufferings to come, listen to me.

“ You can put an end to these sufferings.

“ For that, you must grant me three things.

“ I demand the first to-day ; in eight days the second ; in fifteen days the third.

“ I proportion the importance of my demands to the progress of your suffering, because the more you suffer, the more you will regret me and show yourself docile.

“ Here is my first demand :

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“Send back by the bearer of this note, your nonsuit
of all complaint against Captain Horace.

“Give me by this act a proof of your desire to satisfy
me, and then you will be able to hope that you may find
again

APPETITE.”

CHAPTER X.

WHEN Abbé Ledoux had finished reading this note, he reflected a moment in silence, while the canon, repeating the last words of the letter, said, bitterly :

“ ‘ And you will be able to hope to find Appetite ! ’ What cruel irony in this pitiless pun ! ”

“ That is singular,” said the abbé, thoughtfully. “ Did you see the bearer of this note, Dom Diégo ? ”

“ Did I see him ? Could I lose this opportunity to speak of *him* ? ”

“ Well ? ”

“ Ah, well, one would have thought I was speaking Hebrew to this animal. To my most pressing questions, he responded with a stupid air. I was not able to draw from him either the address or the name of the person who had sent me the note.”

“ And so, canon, it is in obedience to this letter that you have renounced your complaint against this renegade Captain Horace.”

“ Yes, because I hoped, by my deference to the desires of him who holds my life in his hands, to soften his heart of stone, but alas ! this concession has not touched him.”

“ But what relations can exist between this accursed cook and Captain Horace ? ” said Abbé Ledoux, still absorbed in thought. “ Some intrigue is hidden there.”

Then after another silence he added :

“ Dom Diégo, listen to me ; I will not tell you to abandon the hope that some day you may have in your

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service this cook whom you prize so highly. I shall not insist upon the dangers which threaten your eternal salvation in consequence of your persistent and abominable gluttony ; you are at this moment in such a state of excitement that you would not comprehend it."

"I fear so, abbé."

"I am sure of it, canon. I will deal then with you as we deal, permit me to say it, with monomaniacs. I will for the present put myself in your place, extraordinary as it may seem, and I must tell you that you have done exactly the contrary of what you ought to have done, if you wish to gain power over this man, who, as you say, controls your destiny."

"Explain yourself, my dear abbé."

"After all you have confided to me, evidently this cook has no need of a position ; having learned of your favourite vice, he has only sought a pretext for introducing himself into your house ; his connivance with Captain Horace only proves, do you not see, that their plan was arranged beforehand, and they proposed to use your love of eating as a means of gaining influence over you."

"Great God !" cried Dom Diégo, "that is a ray of light!"

"Do you confess your blindness now ?"

"What an infernal plot ! What atrocious Machiavellism !" murmured the canon, thoroughly frightened.

Then he added, with a sigh of dejection, full of bitterness :

"Such dissimulation ! Such perfidy united to such beautiful genius ! Oh, humanity ! Oh, humanity !"

"Let me continue," replied the abbé. "You have already, by your unworthy weakness, deprived yourself of one of the three means by which you might have controlled this great cook, since, as he has had the effrontery to warn you beforehand, there are yet two others he intends to exact from you, and he counts on your deplorable readiness to yield, to obtain them. Now,

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this end once attained, he will laugh at you, and you will see him no more."

"Abbé, that is impossible."

"Why?"

"I tell you, abbé, such treason is impossible. You surely do not believe that men are ferocious beasts, — monsters."

"I believe, canon," replied the abbé, with a shrug of the shoulders, "I believe that a cook who gives gratis wines at one or two louis a bottle — "

"Wait, pray," interrupted Dom Diégo. "Neither one, nor two, nor six louis would pay the cost of such wines. They were nectar, abbé, they were ambrosia, I tell you!"

All the more reason, canon ; a cook who is so prodigal of such costly ambrosia has no need of hiring himself for wages, I imagine."

"I not only offered him wages, I offered him, also, my friendship, — think of it, abbé, I said to this perfidious monster, 'Friend, I will not be your master, I will be your admirer.'"

"You see that he cared as little for your friendship as for your admiration."

"Ah, that would be an ingrate, indeed ! "

"That may be ; but if you wish, in your turn, to put this ingrate at your feet, there is a way for you to do so."

"To put him at my feet! Oh, abbé, if you could work this miracle! but, no, no, you are without pity, you play upon my credulity."

"The miracle is very simple ; refuse absolutely all that this man demands of you, because if he has no need of your friendship or your admiration, he has evidently great need of your leaving off your suit against this Captain Horace. Refuse that, and you will hold your man. I do not know for how long a time you will hold him, but you will hold him. We will see afterward how to

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prolong your power. I am, you see, a man of wise counsel."

"Abbé, you open my eyes, you are right; in refusing his demands, I shall force him to return to me."

"Well, do you agree to it?"

"I was blind, silly! But what do you want, abbé? Despair, inanition! The stomach reacts so terribly on the brain. Ah, why was I so weak as to sign this nonsuit?"

"It is time to recall it."

"You think so, abbé?"

"I am certain of it. I know persons who are very influential with the magistracy."

"What an opportunity, abbé, what an opportunity!"

"We have friends everywhere. Now, listen to what is necessary for you to do. You go at once and present your complaint in legal form; we will attest it immediately at the bar of the king's attorney. We will say to him that the other day when you were in a condition of suffering and wholly irresponsible, you signed the nonsuit, but reflecting upon the sacrilegious crime of Captain Horace, you would fail in your double character of canon and guardian if you did not deliver this criminal to the rigour of the law. Begin by this act of decision and you will soon see this insolent cook, who dictates his orders to you, humble and submissive to your will."

"Abbé, dear abbé, you have saved my life."

"Wait, that is not all. This mysterious unknown, who interests himself so much in Captain Horace, must also interest himself in the captain's marriage with your niece. Evidently this intrigue concerns that, because, understand me, I wager a hundred to one that one of the two things which this impertinent cook reserves to ask of you is your consent to this marriage."

"What a depth of villainy!" cried the canon. "What diabolical plotting! There is no longer room for doubt,

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abbé, such was the plan of this miserable creature. Oh, if in my turn I could only get him in my power!"

"The way is very easy, and whatever may be the cause of it, after the various ramifications of this dark intrigue, of which your niece is the end, you must see that there would be grave dangers in leaving her in Paris, and whatever course you may take in regard to this — "

"She shall enter a convent," interrupted the canon, "that is my intention at all hazards ; she has already caused me enough worry, enough care. I do not like to play the rôle of a guardian in a comedy."

"Your niece, then, will enter a convent ; but to leave her in Paris is to expose her to the plotting of Captain Horace and his friends, and you know their audacity. Perhaps they will abduct her a second time. Imagine what new sorrow that would bring to you."

"But where shall I send this accursed girl ?"

"Let her depart for Lyons to-day, even ; we have an excellent house in that city, once entered there it would be impossible for her to communicate with the outside. Now, see what we are going to do. The first thing is to go at once to the Palais de Justice ; there I shall find an influential person who will recommend me to the king's attorney, in whose hands you will lodge your complaint. After that we will hasten to the convent ; among the livery hacks there is always a carriage ready for an emergency ; one of our sisters and a steady and resolute man will accompany your niece ; you will give your orders to them ; in two hours she will be on the route to Lyons, and before the end of the day Captain Horace will be locked in jail, because, as he believes your complaint is withdrawn, he will come out of the retreat which we have not been able to discover. Once this miscreant arrested, and your niece out of Paris, you will see my Lord Appetite run to you, and with a little address — I will help you if you wish it — you will have

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him at your mercy, and can do with him as you please."

"Dear abbé, you are my saviour!" cried the canon, rising from his seat, his face radiant with hope. "You are a superior man; Father Benoit told me so in Cadiz. Let us go, let us go. I abandon myself blindly to your counsels; everything tells me they are excellent, and that they will place him, who is an angel and a demon to me, in my power for ever."

"Let us go, then, my dear Dom Diégo," said the abbé, hastily putting on his hat, and dragging the canon by the arm.

The moment the canon opened the door of the parlour, he found himself face to face with Doctor Gasterini, who familiarly entered the saintly man's house without announcement.

The abbé was just going to address a word to the doctor, when a cry from the canon he turned abruptly and saw Dom Diégo, pale, motionless, his gaze fixed, and his hands clasped, and his face expressing all the contradictions of stupor, doubt, anguish, and hope. Finally, addressing the abbé, who comprehended nothing of this sudden emotion, the canon pointed to the doctor and stammered, in a broken voice, "It—is—he."

But Dom Diégo was not able to say more, and overcome by emotion he sat down heavily in a chair, closed his eyes, and fell over in utter weakness.

"The devil! the canon here!" said Doctor Gasterini to himself. "Cursed accident!"

Abbé Ledoux, at the sight of Dom Diégo's collapse,—a pathetic picture,—turned to the doctor, and said:

"I think, really, the canon must be ill. What is the matter with him? Your arrival is fortunate, my dear doctor; wait,—here is a vial of salts, it will assist his breathing."

Hardly was the bottle placed to the nostrils of the canon when he sneezed violently, with a cavernous bel-

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lowing, then coming out of his fainting fit, but not having the strength to rise, he turned his languid eyes, suffused with tears, to the doctor, and said, with an accent which he wished to be stern, but which was only tender :

“ Ah, cruel man ! ”

“ Cruel ! ” said the abbé, bewildered, “ why do you call the doctor cruel, Dom Diégo ? ”

“ Yes,” interposed the physician, perfectly calm and smiling, “ what cruelty can you accuse me of, sir ? ”

“ You ask that, you ingrate ! ” said the canon. “ You dare ask that ! ”

“ What ! you call the doctor an ingrate ! ” said the abbé.

“ The doctor ! ” said the canon, “ what doctor ? ”

“ Why, my friend, the man to whom you are speaking,” said the abbé, “ my friend standing there, Doctor Gasterini.”

“ He ! ” cried the canon, rising abruptly. “ I tell you that is my tempter, my seducer ! ”

“ The devil ! he sees him everywhere,” said the abbé, impatiently. “ I repeat it to you that the gentleman is Doctor Gasterini, my friend.”

“ And I repeat to you, abbé,” cried Dom Diégo, “ that the gentleman is the great cook of whom I have spoken to you ! ”

“ Doctor,” said the abbé, earnestly, “ in the name of Heaven, do explain this blunder.”

“ There is no blunder at all, my dear abbé.”

“ What ? ”

“ The canon speaks the truth,” replied Doctor Gasterini. “ Day before yesterday I had the pleasure of preparing a dish for him ; for, in order to have the honour of calling yourself a glutton, you must have a practical acquaintance with the culinary art.

CHAPTER XI.

THE abbé, amazed, looked at Doctor Gasterini, unable to believe what he had heard ; at last he said :

“ What ! you, doctor, have cooked dishes for Dom Diégo ? You ! you ? ”

“ Yes, I, my dear abbé.”

“ A doctor,” exclaimed the canon, in his turn amazed, “ a physician ? ”

“ Yes, canon,” replied Doctor Gasterini, “ I am a physician, which does not prevent my being a passable cook.”

“ Passable ! ” cried the canon, “ say rather, divine ! But what means this — ”

“ I comprehend all ! ” replied Abbé Ledoux, after having remained silent and thoughtful a moment, “ the plot was skilfully contrived.”

“ What is it that you comprehend, abbé ? Of what plot are you talking ? ” said the canon, who, after his first astonishment, began to wonder how a physician could be such an extraordinary cook. “ I pray you explain yourself, abbé ! ”

“ Do you know, Dom Diégo,” asked the abbé, with a bitter smile, “ who Doctor Gasterini is ? ”

“ But,” stammered the canon, wiping the perspiration from his brow, for he had been making superhuman efforts to penetrate the mystery, “ everything is so complicated — so strange — that — ”

“ Doctor Gasterini,” cried the abbé, “ is the uncle of Captain Horace ! Do you understand now, Dom Diégo, the diabolical trick the doctor has played you ? Do you under-

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stand that he has played upon your deplorable gluttony in order to get such a hold on you that he might induce you to abandon your pursuit of Captain Horace, his nephew, and afterward to induce you to consent to the marriage of your niece and the captain ? Do you understand at last to what point you have been duped ? Do you see the depth of the abyss you have escaped ?”

“ My God ! this great cook a doctor ! And he is the uncle of Captain Horace ! ” murmured the canon, stunned by the revelation. “ He is not a real cook ! Oh, illusion of illusions ! ”

The doctor remained silent and imperturbable.

“ Hey, have you been duped enough ? ” asked the abbé. “ Have you played a sufficiently ridiculous rôle ? And do you now believe that the illustrious Doctor Gasterini, one of the princes of science, who has fifty thousand a year income, would hire himself to you as a cook ? Was I wrong in saying that you had been made a scoff and jeer for other persons' amusement ? ”

Every word from the abbé exasperated the anger, the grief, and the despair of the canon. The last remark above all. “ Do you think the celebrated Doctor Gasterini would hire himself for wages, ” gave a mortal blow to the last illusions that Dom Diégo cherished. Turning to the doctor, he said, with an ill-concealed anger :

“ Ah, sir, do you recollect the evil you have done me ? I may die of it, perhaps, but I will have my revenge, if not on you, at least on that rascal, your nephew, and on my unworthy niece, who, no doubt, is also in this abominable intrigue ! ”

“ Well, courage, Dom Diégo ; this righteous vengeance will not tarry, ” said Abbé Ledoux.

Then he turned to the doctor, and said, sarcastically :

“ Ah, doctor, you are doubtless a very shrewd, clever man, but you know the best players sometimes lose the best games, and you will lose this one ! ”

“ Perhaps, ” said the doctor, smiling ; “ who knows ? ”

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"Come, my dear abbé, come," cried the canon, pale and exasperated; "come, let us see the king's attorney, and then we will hasten the departure of my niece."

And, turning to the doctor, he said :

"To employ arms so perfidious, so disloyal! to deceive a confiding and inoffensive man with this odious Machiavellism! I who have eaten with my eyes shut, I who have taken delight upon the very brink of an abyss! Ah, sir, it is abominable, but I will have my revenge!"

"And this very instant," said the abbé. "Come, Dom Diégo, follow me. A thousand pardons, my dear doctor, to leave you so abruptly, but you understand moments are precious."

The canon, boiling with rage, was about to follow the abbé when Doctor Gasterini said, in a calm voice :

"Canon, a word if you please."

"If you listen to him, you are lost, Dom Diégo!" cried the abbé, dragging the canon with him. "The evil spirit himself is not more insidious than this infernal doctor. Decide for yourself after the trick he has played on you. Come, come!"

"Canon," said the doctor, seizing Dom Diégo by the right sleeve, while the abbé, who held the worthy man by the left sleeve, was using every effort to force him to follow him. "Canon," repeated the doctor, "just one word, I pray you."

"No, no!" said the abbé, "let us flee, Dom Diégo, let us flee this serpent tempter."

And the abbé continued to pull the canon by his right sleeve.

"Just a word," said the physician, "and you will see how much this dear abbé deceives you in my place."

"The Abbé Ledoux deceives me in your place! That is too much by far!" cried Dom Diégo. "How, sir, do you dare?"

"I am going to prove to you what I say, canon," said the doctor, earnestly, as he saw Dom Diégo make an

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effort to approach him. The abbé, suspecting the canon's weakness, pulled him violently, and said :

" Recollect, unhappy man, that your mother Eve was lost by listening to the first word of Satan. I adjure you, I command you, to follow me this instant ! If you give way, unhappy man, take care ! One second more, and it is all up with you. Let us go, let us go ! "

" Yes, yes, you are my saviour, take me away from here," stammered the canon, disengaging himself from the grasp of the doctor. " In spite of myself, I am already yielding to the incomprehensible influence of this demon. I recall those Guinea fowl eggs with crab gravy, that trout with frozen Montpellier butter, that celestial roast à la Sardanapalus, and already a dim hope — let us fly, abbé, it is time, let us fly."

" Canon," said the doctor, holding on to the arm of Dom Diégo with all his strength, " listen to me, I pray you."

" *Vade retro, Satanas !*" cried Dom Diégo, with horror, escaping from the doctor's hands.

And dragged along by the abbé, he was on the threshold of the door, when the physician cried :

" I will cook for you as much as you desire, and as long as I shall live, Dom Diégo. Grant me five minutes, and I will prove what I declare. Five minutes, what do you risk ? "

At the magic words, " I will cook for you as much as you desire," the canon seemed nailed to the door-sill, and did not advance a step, in spite of the efforts of the abbé, who was too exhausted to struggle against the weight of such a large man.

" You certainly are stupid !" cried the abbé, losing control of himself, " what a fool you are to have any dealings with him ! "

" Grant me five minutes, Dom Diégo," urged the doctor, " and, if I do not convince you of the reality of my promises, then give free course to your vengeance. I re-

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peat, what do you risk ? I only ask a poor five minutes."

" In fact," said the canon, turning to the abbé, " what would I risk ? "

" Go, you risk nothing !" cried the abbé, pushed to the extreme by the weakness of the canon ; " from this moment you are lost, a scoff and a jeer. Go, go, throw yourself into the jaws of this monster, thrice dull brute that you are ! "

These unfortunate words, uttered by the abbé in anger, wounded the pride of Dom Diégo to the quick, and he replied, with an offended air :

" At least, I will not be brute enough, Abbé Ledoux, to hesitate between the loss of five minutes, and the ruin of my hopes, as weak as they may be."

" As you please, Dom Diégo," replied the abbé, gnawing his nails with anger ; " you are a good, greasy dupe to experiment upon. Really, I am ashamed of having pitied you."

" Not such a dupe, Abbé Ledoux, not such a dupe as you may suppose," said the canon, in a self-sufficient tone. " You are going to discover, and the doctor, too, for no doubt he is going to explain himself."

" At once," eagerly replied the doctor, " at once, my lord canon, and very clearly too, very categorically."

" Let us see," said Dom Diégo, swelling cheeks with an important air. " You discover, sir, that I have now powerful reasons for not allowing myself to be satisfied with chimeras, because, as the abbé has said, I would be a good, greasy dupe to permit you to deceive me, after so many cautions."

" Oh, certainly," said the abbé, in his great indignation, " you are a proud man, canon, and quite capable of fighting this son of Beelzebub."

" By which title you mean me, dear abbé," said the doctor, with sardonic courtesy. " What an ingrate you are ! I come to remind you that you promised to dine

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with me to-day. Permit my lord canon, also,—he is not a stranger to our subject, as you will see.”

“Yes, doctor,” said the abbé, “I did make you this promise, but—”

“You will keep it, I do not doubt, and I will remind you, too, that this invitation was extended in consequence of a little discussion relative to the seven capital sins. Again, canon, I am in the question, and you are going to recognise it immediately.”

“It is true, doctor,” replied the abbé, with a constrained smile, “I would brand, as they deserve to be, the seven capital sins, causes of eternal damnation to the miserable beings who abandon themselves to these abominable vices, and in your passion for paradoxes, you have dared maintain that—”

“That the seven capital sins have good, in a certain point of view, in a certain measure, and gluttony, particularly, may be made an admirable passion.”

“Gluttony!” cried the canon, amazed. “Gluttony admirable!”

“Admirable, my dear canon,” replied the doctor, “and that, too, in the eyes of the wisest, and most sincerely religious men.”

“Gluttony!” repeated the canon, who had listened to the physician with increasing bewilderment, “gluttony!”

“It is even more, my lord canon,” said the doctor, solemnly, “because, for those who are to put it in practice, it becomes an imperious duty to humanity.”

“A duty to humanity!” repeated Dom Diégo.

“And, above all, a question of high civilisation and great policy, my lord canon,” added the doctor, with an air so serious, so full of conviction, that he imposed on the canon, who cried :

“Hold, doctor, if you could only demonstrate that—”

“Do you not see that the doctor is making you ridiculous?” said the abbé, shrugging his shoulders. “Ah, I told you the truth, unhappy Dom Diégo; you are lost,

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for ever lost, as soon as you consent to listen to such follyery."

"Canon," the doctor hastened to add, "let us resume our subject, not by reasoning, which, I confess, may appear to you specious, but by facts, by acts, by proofs, and by figures. You are both a glutton and superstitious. You have not the strength to resist your craving for good things; then, your gluttony satisfied, you are afraid of having committed a great sin, which sometimes spoils the pleasure of good cheer, and above all, injures the calmness and regularity of your digestion. Is this not true?"

"It is true," meekly replied the canon, dominated, fascinated by the doctor's words, "it is too true."

"Well, my lord canon, I wish to convince you, I repeat, not by reasoning, however logical it may be, but by visible, palpable facts and by figures, first, that in being a glutton, you accomplish a mission highly philanthropic, a benefit to civilisation and politics; second, that I can, and will be able to make you eat and drink, when you wish, with far more intense enjoyment than the other day."

"And I, I say to you," cried the abbé, appalled by the doctor's assurance, "that if you prove by facts and figures, as you pretend, that to be a glutton is to accomplish a mission to humanity or high civilisation, or is a thing of great political significance, I swear to you to become an adept in this philosophy, as absurd and visionary as it appears."

"And if you prove to me, doctor, that you can open again, and in the future continue to open the doors of the culinary paradise that you opened to me day before yesterday," cried the canon, palpitating with new hope, "if you prove to me that I accomplish a social duty in yielding myself up to gluttony, you will be able to dominate me, I will be your deputy, your slave, your thing."

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"Agreed, my lord canon, agreed, Abbé Ledoux, you shall be satisfied. Let us depart."

"Depart?" asked the canon, "where?"

"To my house, Dom Diégo."

"To your house," said the canon, with an air of distrust, "to your house?"

"My carriage is below," replied the doctor; "in a quarter of an hour we will arrive there."

"But, doctor," asked the canon, "why go to your house? What are we going to do there?"

"At my house, only, will you be able to find those visible, palpable proofs of what I have declared, for I have come to remind the dear abbé that to-day is the twentieth of November, the day of the investigation to which I have invited him. But the hour advances, gentlemen, let us depart."

"I do not know if I am dreaming or awake," said Dom Diégo, "but I throw myself in the gulf with my eyes shut."

"You must be the very devil himself, doctor, for my instinct and reason revolt against your paradoxes. I do not believe one word of your promises, yet it is impossible for me to resist the curious desire to accompany you."

The canon and the abbé followed the doctor, entered his carriage with him, and soon the three arrived at the house occupied by the distinguished physician.

CHAPTER XII.

DOCTOR GASTERINI lived in a charming house in the Faubourg du Roule, where he soon arrived in company with the canon and Abbé Ledoux.

"While we are waiting for dinner, would you like to take a turn in the garden?" said the doctor, to his guests. "That will give me the opportunity to present to you my poor sister's eight children, my nephews and nieces, whom I have reared and established in the world respectably, entirely by means of gluttony. You see, canon, we still follow our subject."

"What, doctor!" replied the canon, "you have reared a numerous family by means of gluttony?"

"You do not see that the doctor continues to ridicule you!" said the abbé, shrugging his shoulders. "It is too much by far!"

"I give you my word of honour as an honest man," replied Doctor Gasterini, "and besides, I am going to prove to you in a moment, by facts, that if I had not been the greatest gourmand among men, I should never have known how to make for each one of my nephews and nieces the excellent positions which they hold, as worthy, honest, and intelligent labourers, contributing, each in his sphere, to the prosperity of the country."

"So we are really to see people who contribute to the prosperity of the country, and for that we may thank the doctor's love of eating!" said the canon, with amazement.

"No," cried the abbé, "what confounds me is to hear



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such absurdities maintained till the last moment, and — ” but suddenly interrupting himself, he asked with surprise, as he looked around :

“ What is that building, doctor ? It looks like shops.”

“ That is my orangery,” replied the doctor, “ and to-day, as every year at this time, my birthday, they set up shops here.”

“ How is that ; set up shops, and what for ? ” asked the abbé.

“ Zounds ! why, to sell, of course, my dear abbé.”

“ Sell what ? and who is to sell ? ”

“ As to what is sold, you will soon see, and as to the purchasers, why, they are my patrons, who are coming to spend the evening here.”

“ Really, doctor, I do not comprehend you.”

“ You know, my dear abbé, that for a long time charity shops have been kept by some of the prettiest women in Paris.”

“ Ah, yes,” replied the abbé ; “ the proceeds to be given to the poor.”

“ This is the same ; the proceeds of this evening’s sale will be distributed among the poor of my district.”

“ And who are to keep these shops ? ” asked the canon.

“ My sister’s eight children, Dom Diégo. They will sell there, for the charitable purpose I have mentioned, the produce of their own industry. But come, gentlemen, let us enter, and I shall have the honour of introducing to you my nieces and nephews.”

With these words Doctor Gasterini conducted his friends into a vast orangery, where were arranged eight little shops or stalls for the display of wares. The green boxes of a large number of gigantic orange-trees formed the railings and separations of these stalls, so that each one had a ceiling of beautiful foliage.

“ Ah, doctor,” exclaimed the canon, stopping before the first stall in admiration, “ this is magnificent ! I have never seen anything like it in my life. It is magic ! ”

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"It is indeed a feast for the eye," said the abbé. "It is unsurpassed."

Let us see what elicited the just admiration of Doctor Gasterini's guests. The boxes forming the enclosure of the first stall were ornamented with leaves and flowers; on each of these rustic platforms, covered with moss, a collection of fruits and early vegetables was displayed with rare beauty. Golden pineapples with crowns of green lay above immense baskets of grapes of every shade, from the dark purple cluster of the valley to the transparent red from the mountain vineyards. Pyramids of pears, and apples of the rarest and choicest species, of enormous size and variegated with the brightest colours, reached up to summits of bananas, as golden as if the sun of the tropics had ripened them. Farther on dwarf fig-trees in pots, and covered with violet-coloured figs, stood among a rare collection of autumn melons, Brazil pumpkins, and Spanish and white potatoes. Still farther, little rush baskets of hothouse strawberries contrasted with rosy mushrooms, and enormous truffles as black as ebony, obtained from the hotbed by special culture. Then came the rare and early specimens of the season,—green asparagus and varieties of lettuce.

In the midst of these marvels of the vegetable kingdom, which she herself had grouped in such a charming and picturesque scene, stood a beautiful young woman, elegantly attired in the costume of the peasants living in the neighbourhood of Paris.

"I present to you one of my nieces," said the doctor to his guests, "Juliette Dumont, cultivator of early fruits and vegetables, in the open field and hothouse at Montreuil-sous-Bois."

Then, turning to the young woman, the doctor added:

"My child, tell these gentlemen, please, how many gardeners you and your husband employ in your occupation."

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“At least twenty men the whole time, my dear uncle.”

“And their salary, my child.”

“According to your advice, dear uncle, we give them the fixed price of fifty cents, and a part of our profit, in order to interest them as much as we are in the excellence of the work. We find this arrangement the best in the world, for our gardeners, interested as much as ourselves in the prosperity of our undertaking, labour with great zeal. So this year, their part in the income of the establishment has almost amounted to five francs a day.”

“And about how much a year is the whole income, my child?”

“Thanks to our nurseries of fine fruit-trees, we make, dear uncle, from eighty to a hundred thousand francs a year.”

“As much as that?” said the abbé.

“Yes, sir,” replied the young woman; and there are many houses in the neighbourhood of Paris and in the provinces whose incomes are larger than ours.”

The canon, absorbed in the contemplation of fragrant golden fruits, truffles, and mushrooms, and the first vegetables of the season as luscious as they were rare, gave only a distracted attention to the economics of the conversation, and reluctantly accepted the doctor’s invitation, who said to him :

“Let us pass to another specimen of the industry of my family, canon, for each one to-day displays his best wares. Now tell me if that jolly fellow over there is not a true artist.”

And with these words Doctor Gasterini pointed out the second stall to his guests.

In the middle of an enclosure, carpeted with rushes and seaweeds, three large, white marble tables rose one above the other at an interval of one foot, gradually diminishing in size, like the basins of a fountain. On

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these marble slabs, covered with marine herbs, was a fine display of shells, crustaceans, and the choicest and most delicate sea-fish.

On the first slab was a sort of grotto made of shell-work, in which could be seen mussels and oysters from Marennes, Ostend, and Caneale, fattened at an immense expense in the parks. At the base of this slab lobsters, shrimps, and crabs were slowly crawling, or putting out a feeler from under their thick shells.

On the second slab, fringed with long seaweeds of a light green colour, were fish of the most diminutive size and exquisite flavour; sardines gleaming like silver, others of ultramarine blue, others still of bright red, and dainty grill fish with backs as white as snow, and rose-coloured bellies.

Finally, on the last and largest of these marble basins lay, here and there, veritable monsters of the sea, enormous turbots, gigantic salmon, formidable sturgeons, and prodigious tunnies.

A young man with sunburnt complexion, and frank, prepossessing countenance, who recalled the features of Captain Horace, smiled complaisantly at this magnificent exhibition of the products of the sea.

“ Gentlemen, I present to you my nephew Thomas, patron of fisheries at Etretat,” said Doctor Gasterini to his guests, “ and you see that his nets do not bring back sand alone.”

“ I never saw anything in my life more admirable ! I never saw more appetising fish ! ” exclaimed Dom Diégo, with enthusiasm. “ One could almost eat them raw ! ”

“ My boy,” said Doctor Gasterini to his nephew, “ these gentlemen would like to know how many sailors you patron fishers employ in your boats.”

“ Each boat employs eight or ten men and a cabin-boy,” replied patron Thomas. “ You see, my dear uncle, that makes quite a fine array of men, when you think of the number of fishing-boats on the coasts of

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France, from Bayonne to Dunkerque, and from Perpiñan to Cannes."

"And what pay do these men get, my boy?" asked the doctor.

"We buy boats and nets in common, and divide the produce of the fish, and when a sailor is carried away by a big wave, his widow and children succeed to the father's portion; in a word, we work in an association, all for each, and each for all, and I assure you that when it is necessary to throw our nets or draw them in, to furl a sail or give it to the winds, there is no idler among us. All work with a good heart."

"Very well, my brave boy," said the doctor. "But, my lord canon," added he, turning to Dom Diégo, "as a true gourmand, you shall taste scalloped salmon with truffles, and sole minced in the Venetian style. Here we promote one of the noblest industries of the country, and it also contributes to the amelioration of the condition of our marine service. Let this thought, canon, take possession of your mind when you eat sturgeon baked in its own liquor, flavoured highly with Bayonne ham and oyster sauce, mingled with Madeira wine!"

At these words, Dom Diégo opened mechanically his large mouth and shut it, passing his tongue over his lips, with a sigh of greedy desire.

Abbé Ledoux, too discerning not to comprehend the doctor's intention, betrayed increasing resentment, but did not utter a word. The physician affected not to perceive the vexation of his guest. Taking Dom Diégo by the arm, he said, as he conducted him to the third stall :

"Honestly, my lord canon, did you ever see anything more beautiful, more charming, than this?"

"Never, oh, never!" exclaimed Dom Diégo, clasping his hands in admiration, "although the confections of my country are considered the finest in the world."

Nor was there, indeed, anything more captivating or

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more beautiful than this third stall, where was displayed in cups or porcelain dishes everything that the most refined epicureaus could imagine in preserves, confections, and sweetmeats. In one place, crystallised sugar enveloped sparkling stalactites of the most beautiful fruits ; in another, pyramids of all kinds, variegated with the brightest colours,—red with lozenges of rose, green with frozen pistachios shading into tints of lemon ; farther on, oranges, limes, cedras, all covered with a snowy coating of sugar. Again, transparent jellies, made from Rouen apples, and currant jellies from Bar, shone with the prismatic brilliancy of ruby and topaz. Still farther, wide slabs of nougat from Marseilles, white as fresh cream, served as pedestals for columns of chocolate made in Bayonne, and apricot paste from Montpellier. Boxes of preserved fruit from Touraine, as fresh as if they had just been gathered, and in their gorgeous colouring resembling Florentine mosaics, charmed the eyes of the beholder.

A young and pretty woman, a niece of Dr. Gasterini, presided at this exhibition of sweets, and welcomed her uncle with an amiable smile.

“I present to you, gentlemen, my niece Augustine, one of the first confectioners in Paris, a true artist, who carves and paints in sugar, and her masterpieces are literally the crack dainties of Paris ; but this specimen of her ability is nothing : in about a fortnight her shop on Vivienne Street will show a fine display, and I am sure you will see there some marvellous productions of her skill.”

“Certainly, my dear uncle,” replied the smiling mistress of the stall, “we will have the newest sweetmeats, the richest boxes, the most cleverly woven baskets of dainties, and the prettiest little bags, and for all these accessories we have a workshop where we employ thirty artisans, without counting, you understand, all the persons engaged in the laboratory.”

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“ What is the matter with you, my dear abbé ? ” asked the doctor of this saintly man. “ You seem to be quite gloomy. Are you vexed to see that gluttony controls all sorts of industries and productions which count for so much in the commercial progress of France ? Zounds, man, you have not reached the end yet ! ”

“ Well, well,” replied the abbé, under constraint, “ I see what you are coming to, you wicked man, but I will have a response for all. Go on, go on, I do not say a word, but I do not think the less.”

“ I am at your service for discussion, my dear abbé, but in the meanwhile, my lord canon,” continued the doctor, turning to Dom Diégo, “ you ought to be already partially convinced, since you see that you can, without remorse, enjoy the rarest fruits, the most delicate fish, and the most delicious sweetmeats. And more, as I have told you before, since you are a rich man, the consumption of these dainties is for you an imperative social duty, for the more you consume the greater impetus you give to production.”

“ And I realise that in my specialty I am at the height of this noble and patriotic mission ! ” exclaimed the canon, with enthusiasm. “ You give me, dear doctor, the consciousness of duty performed.”

“ I did not expect less from the loftiness of your soul, my lord canon,” replied the physician, “ but a day will come when this kind mission of consumer that you accept with such proud interest will be more generally disseminated, and we will talk of that another time, but before passing on to the next stall I must ask your indulgence for my poor nephew Leonard, who presides at the exhibition you are going to see.”

“ Why my indulgence, doctor ? ”

“ Because, you see, my nephew Leonard follows a rather dangerous calling, but he has followed the bent of his inclination. This devil of a boy has been reared like a savage. Put to nurse with a peasant woman

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living on the frontier of the forest of Sénart, he was so puny for a long time that I allowed him to remain in the country until he was twelve years old. The peasant woman's husband was an arrant poacher, and my nephew had his bump for the chase as well developed as a hunting hound. You can judge what his bloodhound propensities would become under the tutelage of such a foster-parent. At the age of six years, sickly as he was, Leonard passed the whole day in the woods, busy with traps for rabbits, hares, and pheasants. At ten years the little man inaugurated his career as a hunter by killing a superb roebuck, one winter night, by the light of the moon. I was ignorant of all that. When, however, he was twelve years old, he seemed to have grown strong enough, and I placed him at school. Three days after, he scaled the walls which surrounded the boarding-school and returned to the forest of Sénart. In a word, canon, nothing has been able to conquer the boy's passion for hunting. And, unfortunately, I confess that I became an accomplice by making him a present of a newly invented gun, so perfect and handy that it would make of you, my dear abbé, as accomplished a hunter as my nephew. He is not alone. Thousands of families live upon the superfluous game of rich proprietors who hunt, not from necessity, but because they find it an amusement. So, my lord canon, in tasting a leg of jerked venison, a hash of young partridge, or a thigh of roasted pheasant, — I could not do you the wrong of supposing you would prefer the wing, — you can assure yourself that you are contributing to the support of a number of poor households."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE doctor, having concluded his eulogy upon the chase, approached his nephew's stall, and, with a significant gesture, pointed out to the canon and the abbé the finest exhibition of game that could be imagined.

The English gamekeepers, great masters of the art of grouping game, thus making real pictures of dead nature, would have recognised the superiority of Leonard.

Imagine a knotty, umbrageous tree six or seven feet high, standing in the middle of this stall. At the foot of the tree were grouped, on a bed of bright green fern, a young wild boar, a magnificent fallow deer, two years old, the proper age for venison, and two fine roebucks. These animals were lying in a restful position, the head gently bent over the shoulder, as if they were in their accustomed haunts in the depths of the forest. Long flexible branches of ivy fell from the lower boughs of the tree, among whose glossy leaves could be seen hares and rabbits, alternating with the wild geese of ashen-gray colour, wild ducks with green heads and feathers tipped with white, pheasants with scarlet eyes and necks of changeable blue and plumage shining like burnished copper; and silver-coloured bustards, a bird of passage quite rare in our climate. Here and there, branches of holly with purple berries, and the rosy bloom of heather mingled gracefully with the game disposed at different heights. Then came groups of woodcocks, gray partridges, red partridges, gold-coloured plovers, water-hens as black as ebony, with yellow beaks; upon the highest boughs the most delicate game was suspended,—quails,

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thrushes, fig-peckers, and rails, those kings of the plain ; and finally, at the top of the tree, a magnificent heath-cock, caught, no doubt, in the mountains of Ardennes, seemed to open his broad wings of brown, touched with blue, and hover over this hecatomb of game.

Leonard, an agile, slender lad with a fawn-coloured eye, and frank, resolute face, contemplated his work with admiration, giving here and there a finishing touch, contrasting the red of a partridge with the green branch of a juniper-tree, or the shining ebony of a water-hen with the bright rose of the heather bloom.

“ I have informed these gentlemen of your frightful trade, my bad boy,” said Doctor Gasterini to his nephew Leonard, with a smile. “ My lord canon and the saintly abbé will pray for the salvation of your soul.”

“ Oh, oh, my good uncle ! ” replied Leonard, good-naturedly, “ I would rather have them pray for success in shooting the two finest deer, as company for the wild boar I have killed, whose head and fillets I present to you, uncle.”

“ Alas, alas, he is incorrigible ! ” said Doctor Gasterini, “ and unhappily, my lord canon, you have no idea of the deliciousness of the flavour peculiar to the minced fillets and properly stuffed head of a year-old wild boar, seasoned à la Saint Hubert ! Ah, my dear canon, how rich, how juicy ! It was right to put this divine dish under the protection of the patron saint of the chase. But let us pass on,” continued the doctor, preceding Dom Diégo, who was fascinated and dazzled by a display entirely novel to him, for such wealth of game is unknown in Spain.

“ Oh, how grand is Nature in her creations ! ” said the canon ; “ what a marvellous scale of pleasures for the palate from the monstrous wild boar to the fig-pecker,—that exquisite little bird ! Glory, glory to thee, eternal gratitude to thee,” added he, in the manner of an ejaculatory prayer.

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"Bravo, Dom Diégo!" cried the doctor, "now are you in the right."

"Now he is in materialism, in paganism, and the grossest pantheism," said the intractable abbé. "You will damn him, doctor, you will destroy his soul!"

"Still a little patience, my dear abbé," replied the doctor, walking toward another stall. "Soon, in spite of yourself, you will be convinced that I speak truly in extolling the excellence of gluttony, or rather you will think as I do, although you will take occasion to deny the evidence. Now, canon, you are going to see how this gluttony, so dear to you and me, becomes one of the causes of the progress of agriculture, the real basis of the prosperity of the country. And with this subject let me introduce to you my nephew Mathurin, a tiller of those salt meadows, which nourish the only beasts worthy of the gourmand, and which give him those invaluable legs of mutton, those unsurpassed cutlets, those fillets of wonderful beef which even England envies us. I present to you also my nephew Mathurin's wife, native of Le Mans, and familiar with that illustrious school of fattening animals, which produces those pullets and capons known as one of the glories and riches of France.

The shop of farmer Mathurin was undeniably less picturesque, less pretty, and by no means so showy as the others, but it had, by way of compensation, an attractive and dignified simplicity.

Upon large screens of willow branches, covered with thyme, sage, rosemary, tarragon, and other aromatic herbs, were displayed, in Herculean size, monstrous pieces of beef for roasting, fabulous sirloins, marvellous loins of veal, and those legs and saddles of mutton, and unparalleled cutlets, which have filled the hundred mouths of Rumour with the incomparable flavour of the famous beasts of the salt meadows.

Although raw, this delicious meat, surrounded with sweet and pungent herbs, was so delicate and of such a

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tempting red with its fat of immaculate whiteness, that the glances which Dom Diégo threw upon these specimens of bovine and ovine industry, were nothing less than carnivorous. Half hidden among clusters of watercresses was a collection of pullets, capons, pure India cocks, and a species of fowl called tardillons, so round and fat and plump, and with a satin skin of such delicacy, that more than one pretty woman might have envied them.

“Oh, how pretty they are! how lovely they are!” stammered the canon. “Oh, it is enough to make one lose his head!”

“Ah, my dear canon,” said the doctor, “pray, what will you say when the charming pallor of these pullets will turn into gold by the fires of the turnspit? when, distended almost to breaking by truffles made bluish under their delicate epidermis, this satin skin becomes rosy until it sheds the tear-drops of purple juice, watered by the slow distillation of its fat, as exquisitely delicate as the fat of a quail.”

“Enough, doctor!” cried the canon, excited, “enough, I pray you, of braving scandal. I will attack one of those adorable pullets, without the least respect to its present condition.”

“Calm yourself, my Lord Dom Diégo,” said the doctor, smiling, “the dinner hour approaches and you can then pay your homage to two sisters of these adorable fowls.”

Then, addressing his nephew Mathurin, the doctor said :

“My boy, these gentlemen think the produce of your farm very wonderful.”

“The gentlemen are very kind, dear uncle,” replied Mathurin, “but it is the cattle of one who chooses and loves the work! I do not fear the English or the Ardennois, upon the flavour of my beef, my veal, or my mutton from the salt meadows which make my reputation and my fortune. Because, you see, gentlemen,

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the prime object of agriculture is to make food, as we say. The cattle produce the manure, the manure the pasture, the pasture the fertility of the earth, and the fertility of the earth gives provision and pasturage to the cattle. All is bound together: the more the cattle is finely fattened, the better it is for the eater, according to our proverb; the better it sells, the better is the manure and consequently better is the culture. So with the poultry of Mathurin; without doubt, it is a great expense and requires many persons on the farm, for perhaps, gentlemen, you will not believe that to fatten one of these capons and one of these pullets as you see them here, we must open the beak and, fifteen or twenty times a day, put down the throat little balls of barley flour and milk, and that, too, for three months! But we get a famous product, because each capon brings us more than a weak mutton or veal. But immense care is necessary. So, with the advice of this dear uncle, whose advice is always good, we show every year at Christmas what we do on the farm. In the evening, upon the return of the cattle, the first two beeves which enter the stable, the finest or the poorest, no matter, chance decides it, are set aside; it is the same with the first six calves; afterward, when the cages of the fowls are opened, the first dozen capons, the first dozen pullets, and the first dozen cocks which come out are set aside."

"What good is that?" asked the abbé. "What is done with these animals thus appointed by fate?"

"We make a lot of them and they are sold for the profit of the people on the farm. This profit is in addition to their fixed wages. You understand, gentlemen, that all my people are thus interested in the cattle and the poultry, which receive the best possible care, inasmuch as chance alone decides the lot of *encouragement*, as we call it. What is the result, gentlemen? It is that cattle and poultry become almost as much the property

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of my people as mine, because the finer the lot, the dearer it sells, and the larger the profit. Eh, gentlemen, would you believe that, thanks to the zeal, the care and diligence which my farm people give to the hope of this profit, I gain more than I give, because our interest is common, so that in improving the condition of these poor people, I advance my own."

"The moral of all this, my lord canon, is," said the doctor, smiling, "that it is necessary to eat as many fine sirloins as possible, as many tender cutlets from the salt meadows, and give oneself with equal devotion to the unlimited consumption of pullets, capons, and India cocks, so as to encourage this industry."

"I will try, doctor," said the canon, gravely, "to attain to the height of my duties."

"And they are more numerous than you think, Dom Diégo, because it depends upon you too to see that poor people are better clothed and better shod, and to this you can make especial contribution, by eating plenty of veal stewed à la Samaritan, plenty of beefsteak with anchovy sauce, and plenty of lambs' tongues à la d'Uxelle."

"Come now, doctor," said the canon, "you are joking!"

"You are rather slow in discovering that, Dom Diégo," said the abbé.

"I am speaking seriously," replied the doctor, "and I am going to prove it to you, Dom Diégo. What are shoes made of?"

"Of leather, doctor."

"And what produces this leather? Do not beeves, sheep, and calves? It is then evident that the more cattle consumed, the more the price of leather is diminished, and good health-promoting shoes become more accessible to the poor, who can afford only wooden shoes."

"That is true," said the canon, with a thoughtful expression. "It is certainly true."

"Now," continued the doctor, "of what are good

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woollen garments and good woollen stockings woven ? Of the fleece of the sheep ! Now, then, the greater the consumption of mutton, the cheaper wool becomes."

"Ah, doctor," cried the canon, carried away by a sudden burst of fine philosophy, "what a pity we cannot eat six meals a day ! Yes, yes, a man could kill himself with indigestion for the greater happiness of his fellow men."

"Ah, Dom Diégo !" replied the doctor, in a significant tone. "Such perhaps is the martyrdom which awaits you!"

"And I shall submit to it with joy," cried the canon, enthusiastically. "It is sweet to die for humanity!"

Abbé Ledoux could no longer doubt that Dom Diégo was wholly beyond his influence, and manifested his vexation by angry glances, and disdainful shrugs of his shoulders.

"Oh, my God, doctor," suddenly exclaimed the canon, expanding his wide nostrils over and over again, "what is that appetising odour I scent there ?"

"That is the exhibition of the industry pursued by my nephew Michel, my lord canon ; these things are just out of the oven ; see what a golden brown they have, how dainty they are !"

And Doctor Gasterini pointed out to the canon, the most marvellous specimens of pastry and bakery that one could possibly imagine : immense pies of game, of fish and of fowl, delicious morsels of baked shell-fish, fruit pies, little tarts with preserves and creams of all sorts, smoking cakes of every description, meringues with pineapple jelly, burnt almonds and sugared nuts, nougats mounted in shape of rocks, supporting temples of sugar candy, graceful ships of candy, whose top of fine spun sugar, resembling filigree work of silver, disclosed a dish of vanilla cakes, floating in rose-coloured cream whipped as light as foam. The list of wonderful

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dainties would be too long to enumerate, and Canon Dom Diégo stood before them in mute admiration.

“The dinner hour approaches, and I must go to my stoves, to give the finishing touch to certain dishes, which my pupils have begun,” said Doctor Gasterini to his guest. “But to prove to you the importance of this appetising branch of industry, I will limit myself to a single question.”

And addressing his nephew Michel, he said :

“My boy, tell the gentleman how much the stock of pastry you exhibit in the street of La Paix has cost.”

“You ought to know, uncle,” replied Michel, smiling affectionately at Doctor Gasturini, “for you advanced the money necessary for the expenditure.”

“My faith, boy, you have reimbursed me long ago, and I have forgotten the figures. Let us see. It was—”

“Two hundred thousand francs, uncle. And I have done an excellent business. Besides, the house is good, because my predecessor made there twenty thousand a year income in ten years.”

“Twenty thousand income!” cried Dom Diégo in astonishment, “twenty thousand!”

“Now you see, my lord canon, how capital is created by eating hot pies and plum cake with pistachios. But would you like to see something really grand? For this time we are discussing an industry which affects not only the interests of almost all the counties of France, but which extends over a great part of Europe and the East,—that is to say, Germany, Italy, Greece, Spain, and Portugal. An industry which puts in circulation an enormous amount of capital, which occupies entire populations, whose finest products sometimes reach a fabulous price,—an industry, in short, which is to gluttony what the soul is to the body, what mind is to matter. Wait, Dom Diégo, look and reverence, for here the youngest are already very old.”

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Immediately, through instinct, the canon took off his hat, and reverently bowed his head.

“I present to you my nephew Theodore, commissary of fine French and foreign wines,” said the doctor to the canon.

There was nothing brilliant or showy in this stall ; only simple wooden shelves filled with dusty bottles and above each shelf a label in red letters on a black ground, which made the brief and significant announcement :

“*France*. — Chambertin (comet) ; Clos-Vougeat, 1815 ; Volney (comet) ; Nuits, 1820 ; Pomard, 1834 ; Châblis, 1834 ; Pouilly (comet) ; Château Margot, 1818 ; Haut-Brion, 1820 ; Château Lafitte, 1834 ; Sauterne, 1811 ; Grave (comet) ; Roussillon, 1800 ; Tavel, 1802 ; Cahors, 1793 ; Lunel, 1814 ; Frontignan (comet) ; Rivesaltes, 1831 ; Foamy Ai, 1820 ; Ai rose, 1831 ; Dry Sillery (comet) ; Eau de vie de Cognac, 1757 ; Anisette de Bordeaux, 1804 ; Ratafia de Louvres, 1807.

“*Germany*. — Johannisberg, 1779 ; Rudestcimer, 1747 ; Hocheimer, 1760 ; Tokai, 1797 ; Vermouth, 1801 ; Vin de Hongrie, 1783 ; Kirchenwasser of the Black Forest, 1801.

“*Holland*. — Anisette, 1821 ; Curacao red, 1805 ; White Curacao, 1820 ; Genievre, 1799.

“*Italy*. — Lacryma Christi, 1803 ; Imola, 1819.

“*Greece*. — Chypre, 1801 ; Samos, 1813.

“*Ionian Islands*. — Marasquin de Zara.

“*Spain*. — Val de Penas, 1812 ; Xeres dry, 1809 ; Sweet Xeres, 1810 ; Escatelle, 1824 ; Tintilla de Rota, 1823 ; Malaga, 1799.

“*Portugal*. — Po, 1778.

“*Island of Madeira*. — Madeira, 1810 ; having made three voyages from the Indies.

“*Cape of Good Hope*. — Red and white and pale wines, 1826.”

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While Dom Diégo was looking on with profound interest, Doctor Gasterini said to his nephew :

“ My boy, do you recollect the price at which some celebrated wine-cellars have been sold ? ”

“ Yes, dear uncle,” replied Michel, “ the Duke of Sussex owned a wine-cellar which was sold for two hundred and eighty thousand francs ; Lafitte’s wine-cellar sold in Paris for nearly one hundred thousand francs ; the one belonging to Lagillièrè, also in Paris, was sold for sixty thousand francs.”

“ Well, well, Dom Diégo,” said Doctor Gasterini to his guest, “ what do you think of it ? Do you believe all this to be an abomination, as that wag Abbé Ledoux, who is observing us now with such a deceitful countenance, declares ? Do you think the passion, which promotes an industry of such importance, deserves to be anathematised only ? Think of the expenditure of labour in their transport and preservation that these wine-cellars must have cost. How many people have lived on the money they represent ? ”

“ I think,” said the canon, “ that I was blind and stupid never to have comprehended, until now, the immense social, political, and industrial influence I have wielded by eating and drinking the choicest viands and wines. I think now that the consciousness of accomplishing a mission to the world in giving myself up to unbridled gluttony, will be a delicious aperient for my appetite,—a consciousness which I owe to you, and to you only, doctor. Oh, noble thinker ! Oh, grand philosophy ! ”

“ This is the science of gastronomy carried to insanity,” said Abbé Ledoux. “ It is a new paganism.”

“ My Lord Diégo,” continued the doctor, “ we will speak of the gratitude which you think you owe me, when we have taken a view of this last shop. Here is an industry which surpasses in importance all of which we have been speaking. The question is a grave one,

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for it turns the scale of gluttony's influence upon the equilibrium of Europe."

"The equilibrium of Europe!" said the canon, more and more dismayed. "What has eating to do with the equilibrium of Europe?"

"Go on, go on, Dom Diégo," said Abbé Ledoux, shrugging his shoulders, "if you listen to this tempter, he will prove to you things still more astonishing."

"I am going to prove, my dear abbé, both to you and to Dom Diégo, that I advance nothing but what is strictly true. And, first, you will confess, will you not, that the marine service of a nation like France has great weight in the balance of the destinies of Europe?"

"Certainly," said the canon.

"Well, what follows?" said the abbé.

"Now," pursued the doctor, "you will agree with me, that as this military marine service is strengthened or enfeebled, France gains or loses in the same proportion?"

"Evidently," said the canon.

"Conclude your argument," cried the abbé, "that is what I am waiting for."

"I will conclude then, my dear abbé, by saying that the more progress gluttony makes, the more accessible it becomes to the greatest number, the more will the military marine of France gain in strength and in influence, and that, my Lord Dom Diégo, I am going to demonstrate to you by begging you to read that sign."

And just above the door of this last stall, the only one not occupied by a niece or nephew of Doctor Gasterini, were the words "Colonial Provisions."

"Colonial provisions," repeated the canon aloud, looking at the physician with an interrogating air, while the abbé, more discerning, bit his lips with vexation.

"Do I need to tell you, lord canon, pursued the doctor, "that without colonies, we would have no merchant service, and without a merchant service, no navy for war, since the navy is recruited from the seamen

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in the merchant service? Well, if the lovers of good eating did not consume all the delicacies which you see exhibited here in small samples,—sugar, coffee, vanilla, cloves, cinnamon, ginger, rice, pistachios, Cayenne pepper, nutmeg, liquors from the islands, hachars from the Indies, what, I ask you, would become of our colonies, that is to say, our maritime power?"

"I am amazed," cried the canon, "I am dizzy; at each step I feel myself expand a hundred cubits."

"And, zounds! you are right, lord Dom Diégo," said the doctor, "for indeed, when, after having tasted at dessert a cheese frozen with vanilla, to which will succeed a glass of wine from Constance or the Cape, you take a cup of coffee, and conclude of course with one or two little glasses of liquor from the islands, flavoured with cloves or cinnamon, ah, well, you will further heroically the maritime power of France, and do in your sphere as much for the navy as the sailor or the captain. And speaking of captains, lord canon," added the doctor, sadly, "I wish you to observe that among all the shops we have seen, this one alone is empty, because the captain of the ship which has brought all these choice provisions from the Indies and the colonies dares not show himself, while he is under the cloud of your vengeance. I mean, canon, my poor nephew, Captain Horace. He alone has failed to come, to-day, to this family feast."

"Ah, the accursed serpent!" muttered the abbé, "how adroitly he goes to his aim; how well he knows how to wind this miserable brute, Dom Diégo, around his finger."

At the name of Captain Horace, the canon started, then relapsed into thoughtful silence.

CHAPTER XIV.

CANON DOM DIÉGO, after a few moments' silence, extended his fat hand to Doctor Gasterini, and, trembling with emotion, said :

"Doctor, Captain Horace cost me my appetite ; you have restored it to me, I hope, for the remainder of my life ; and much more, you have, according to your promise, proven to me, not by specious reasoning, but by facts and figures, that the gourmand, as you have declared with so much wisdom, accomplishes a high social and political mission in the civilised world ; you have delivered me from the pangs of remorse by giving me a knowledge of the noble task that my epicureanism may perform, and in this sacred duty, doctor, I will not fail. So, in gratitude to you, in appreciation of you, I hope to acquit myself modestly by declaring to you that, not only shall I refuse to enter a complaint against your nephew, Captain Horace, but I cordially bestow upon him the hand of my niece in marriage."

"As I told you, canon," said the abbé, "I was very sure that once this diabolical doctor had you in his clutches, he would do with you all that he desired. Where now are the beautiful resolutions you made this morning ?"

"Abbé," replied Dom Diégo, in a self-sufficient tone, "I am not a child ; I shall know how to stand at the height of the rôle the doctor has marked out for me."

Then turning to the doctor, he added :

"You can instruct me, sir, what to write ; a reliable person will take my letter and go immediately in your

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carriage to the convent for my niece, and conduct her to this house."

"Lord Dom Diégo," replied the doctor, "you assure the happiness of our two children, the joy of my declining days, and consequently your satisfaction and pleasure in the indulgence of your appetite, for I shall keep my word; I will make you dine every day better than I made you breakfast the other morning. A wing of this house will henceforth be at your disposal; you will do me the honour of eating at my table, and you see that, after the professions I have chosen for my nieces and nephews,—with the knowledge and taste of an epicure, as I have told you,—my larder and my wine-cellar will be always marvellously well appointed and supplied. I am growing old, I have need of a staff in my old age. Horace and his wife shall never leave me. I shall confide to them the collection of my culinary traditions, that they may transmit them from generation to generation; we shall all live together, and we shall enjoy in turn the practice and philosophy of gluttony, my lord canon."

"Doctor, I set my foot upon the very threshold of paradise!" cried the canon. "Ah, Providence is merciful, it loads a poor sinner like myself with blessings!"

"Heresy! blasphemy! impiety!" cried Abbé Ledoux. "You will be damned, thrice damned, as will be your tempter!"

"Come now, dear abbé," replied the doctor, "none of your tricks. Confess at once that I have convinced you by my reasoning."

"I! I am convinced!"

"Certainly, because I defy you—you and all like you, past, present, or future—to get out of this dilemma."

"Let us hear the dilemma."

"If gluttony is a monstrosity, then frugality pushed to the extreme ought to be a virtue."

"Certainly," answered the abbé.

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“Then, my dear abbé, the more frugal a man is, according to your theory, the more deserving is he.”

“Evidently, doctor.”

“So the man who lives on uncooked roots, and drinks water only for the purpose of self-mortification, would be the type and model of a virtuous man.”

“And who doubts it? You can find that celestial type among the anchorites.”

“Admirable types, indeed, abbé! Now, according to your ideas of making proselytes, you ought to desire most earnestly that all mankind should approach this type of ideal perfection as nearly as possible,—a man inhabiting a cave and living on roots. The beautiful ideal of your religious society would then be a society of cave-dwellers and root-eaters, administering rough discipline by way of pastime.”

“Would to God it might be so!” sternly answered the abbé; “there would be then as many righteous on the earth as there are men.”

“In the first place that would deplete the census considerably, my dear abbé, and afterward there would be the little inconvenience of destroying with one blow all the various industries, the specimens of which we have just been admiring. Without taking into account the industry of weavers who make our cloth, silversmiths who emboss silver plate, fabricators of porcelain and glass, painters, gilders, who embellish our houses, upholsterers, etc., that is to say, society, in approaching your ideal, would annihilate three-fourths of the most flourishing industries, and, in other words, would return to a savage state.”

“Better work out your salvation in a savage state,” persisted the opinionated Abbé Ledoux, “than deserve eternal agony by abandoning yourself to the pleasures of a corrupt civilisation.”

“What sublime disinterestedness! But then, why leave so generously these renunciations to others, these

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bitter, cruel privations, abandoning to them your part of paradise, and modestly contenting yourself with easy living here below, sleeping on eider-down, refreshing yourself with cool drinks, and comforting your stomach with warm food? Come, let us talk seriously, and confess that this is a veritable outrage, a veritable blasphemy against the munificence of creation, not to enjoy the thousand good things which she provides for the satisfaction of the creature."

" Pagans, materialists, philosophers!" exclaimed Abbé Ledoux, " who are not able to admit what, in their infernal pride, they are not able to comprehend!"

" Yes, *credo quia absurdum*. This axiom is as old as the world, my dear abbé, but it does not prevent the world's progress to the overthrow of your theories of privation and renunciation. Thank God, the world continually seeks welfare! Believe me, it is not necessary to reduce mankind to feeding on roots and drinking water; on the contrary, we ought to work to the end that the largest possible number may live, at least, upon good meats, good poultry, good fruit, good bread, and pure wine. Nature, in her infinite wisdom, has made man insatiable in demands for his body, and in the aspirations of his intelligence, and, if we think only of the wonderful things which man has made to gratify his five senses, for which nature has provided so bountifully, we are struck with admiration. We are then but obeying natural laws to labour with enthusiasm for the comfort and well-being of others, by the consumption and use of these provisions, and, as I told the canon, to do, each in his own sphere, as much as possible; in short, to enjoy without remorse, because — But the clock strikes six; come with me, my lord canon, and write the letter which is to bring your charming niece here. I will take a last look at my laboratory, where two of my best pupils have undertaken duties which I have entrusted to them. The dear abbé will await me in the parlour, for I intend to

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complete my programme and prove to him, by economic facts, not only the excellence of gluttony, but also of the other passions he calls the deadly sins."

"Very well, we will see how far you will push your sacrilegious paradoxes," said Abbé Ledoux, imperturbably. "Besides, all monstrosities are interesting to observe, but, doctor — doctor — three centuries ago, what a magnificent *auto da fé* they would have made of you!"

"A bad roast, my dear abbé! It would not be worth much more than the result of that hunt that you made in the glorious time of your fanaticism against the Protestants in the mountains of Cévennes. Bad game, abbé. Well, I shall be back soon, my dear guests," said the doctor, taking his departure.

The canon having written to the mother superior of the convent, a man in the confidence of Doctor Gasterini departed in a carriage to fetch Senora Dolores Salcedo, and at the same time to inform Captain Horace and his faithful Sans-Plume that they could come out of their hiding-place.

A half-hour after the departure of this emissary, the canon, the abbé, as well as the nieces and nephews of Doctor Gasterini, and several other guests, met in the doctor's parlour.

CHAPTER XV.

DOLORES and Horace soon arrived, within a short interval of each other, at the house of Doctor Gasterini. We leave the reader to imagine the joy of the two lovers and the expression of their tender gratitude to the doctor and the canon. The profound pity of the canon, the consciousness of assuring the happiness of his niece, were manifested by a hunger as rapacious as that of a tiger, as he whispered, with a doleful voice, in the doctor's ear :

" Alas, alas ! will your other guests never come, doctor ? Some people have such frightful egotism ! "

" My guests will not delay much longer, my dear canon ; it is half-past six, and at seven o'clock every one knows that I go to the table relentlessly."

In fact the invited guests of the doctor were not long in assembling, and a valet announced successsively the following names :

" The Duke and Duchess of Senneterre-Maillefort ! "

" Pride," whispered the doctor to the canon and abbé, who made a wry face as he recalled the misadventure of his protégé, who pretended to the hand of the rich heiress, Mlle. de Beaumesnil.

" How amiable you are, duchess, to have accepted my invitation !" said the doctor to Herminie, whom he advanced to welcome, kissing her hand respectfully. " If I must tell you, madame, I counted on you to decide on this dear pride, that M. de Maillefort, M. de Senneterre, and I admire so much in you."

" And how is that, my dear doctor ? " said Gerald de

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Senneterre, affectionately. "I well know that I owe the happiness of my life to my wife's pride, but—"

"Our dear doctor is right," replied Herminie, smiling. "I am very proud of the friendship he has for us, and I avail myself of every opportunity to show him how much I appreciate his attachment, without even speaking of the eternal gratitude we owe him for his devoted care of my son and the daughter of Ernestine. I need not tell you, dear doctor, how much she regrets not being here this evening, but her indisposition keeps her at home, and dear Olivier and her uncle, M. de Maillefort, do not leave the interesting invalid one minute."

"There is nothing like these old sailors, these old soldiers of Africa, and these duellist marquises to make good nurses, without wishing to depreciate the terrible Madame Barbançon," replied the doctor, gaily. "Only, duchess, permit me to differ from you in the construction you have placed on my words. I wished to say that your own tendency to pride assured me beforehand that you will encourage in me that delightful sin, in making me proud to have you in my house."

"And I, doctor," said Gerald de Senneterre, smiling, "I declare that you encourage in us alarmingly the dainty sin of gluttony, because when one has dined at your house, he becomes a gourmand for ever!"

The conversation of the doctor, Herminie, and Gerald, to which the canon was giving close attention, was interrupted by the voice of the valet, who announced :

"M. Yvon Cloarek!"

"Anger," whispered the doctor to the canon, advancing to meet the old corsair, who, notwithstanding his great age, was still hale and vigorous.

"Long live the railroads! for I come this instant from Havre, my old comrade, to assist at the anniversary of your birthday," said Yvon, cordially grasping the doctor's hands, "and to come here I have left Sabine, Sabinon, and Sabinette,—names that the old centenarian,

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Segoffin, my head artilleryman, has given to my granddaughter and great-granddaughter, for I am a great-grandfather, you know."

"Zounds! old comrade, and I hope you will not stop at that!"

"And so my son-in-law, Onésime, whom you ushered into life thirty years ago, charged me to remember him to you. And here I am!"

"Could you fail to be at our annual reunions, Yvon, my brave comrade, I should have one of those magnificent attacks of anger which used to possess you."

Then turning to the canon and the abbé, the doctor presented Yvon, saying :

"This is Captain Cloarek, one of our oldest and most illustrious corsairs, the famous hero of the brig *Hell-hound*, which played wonderful tricks at the end of the Empire."

"Ah, captain," said the canon, "in 1812 I was at Gibraltar, and I had the honour of often hearing you and your ship cursed by the English."

"And do you know, my dear canon, to what admirable sin Captain Cloarek owes his glory, and the services he rendered to France in the victorious cruises he made against the English?" I am going to tell you, and my old friend will not contradict me. Glory, success, riches,—he owes all to anger."

"To anger?" exclaimed the abbé.

"To anger!" said the canon.

"The truth is, gentlemen," modestly answered Cloarek, "that the little I have done for my country I owe to my naturally tremendous anger."

"M. and Madame Michel," announced the valet.

"Indolence," said the doctor to the canon and the abbé, approaching Florence and her husband,—Michel having married Madame de Lucenay after the death of M. de Lucenay, victim of a balloon ascension he had attempted from Mount Chimborazo, in company with Valentine.

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“Ah, madame,” said Doctor Gasterini, gallantly kissing the hand of Florence, “how well I know your good-will when you tear yourself away from your self-indulgent, sweet habits of idleness, to give me the pleasure of having you at my house before your departure for your beautiful retreat in Provence.”

“Why, my good doctor,” replied the young woman, smiling, “do you forget that indolent people are capable of everything?”

“Even of making the incredible effort of coming to dine with one of their best friends,” added Michel, grasping the doctor’s hand.

“And to think,” replied Doctor Gasterini, “just to think that several years ago I was consulted for the purpose of curing you of this dreadful sin of indolence. Happily the limitations of science, and especially the profound respect I feel for the gifts of the Creator, prevented my attempt upon the ineffable supineness with which you are endowed.”

And designating Abbé Ledoux by a glance of his eye, the doctor added :

“And, madame, Abbé Ledoux, whom I have the honour of presenting to you, considers me, at this hour even, a pagan, a dreadful idolater. Be good enough to rehabilitate me in his opinion, by informing this saintly man that you and your husband have, in the midst of profound and invincible idleness, exercised an activity without bounds, an inconceivable energy, and a sagacity which have secured for both of you an honourable independence.”

“For the honour of indolence, respected abbé,” replied Florence, smiling; “I am obliged to do violence to my own modesty, as well as that of my husband, by confessing that the dear doctor has spoken the truth.”

“M. Richard!” announced the valet.

“Avarice,” whispered the doctor to the canon and

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the abbé, while the father of Louis Richard, the happy husband of Mariette, advanced to meet him.

“Is this M. Richard?” said the abbé, in a low voice to Doctor Gasterini, “the founder of those schools and houses of retreat established at Chaillot, and so admirably organised?”

“It is he, himself,” replied the doctor, extending his hand to the old man, as he said, “Welcome, good Richard, the abbé was just speaking to me of you.”

“Of me, dear doctor?”

“Or, if you prefer it, of your wonderful endowments at Chaillot.”

“Ah, doctor,” said the old man, “you must render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar’s,—my son is the founder of those charitable institutions.”

“Let us see, my good Richard,” replied the doctor, “if you had not been as thorough a miser as your friend, Ramon, your worthy son would not have been able to make your name blessed everywhere as he has done.”

“As to that, doctor, it is the pure truth, and, too, I confess to you that there is not a day I do not thank God, from this fact, for having made me the most avaricious of men.”

“And how is your son’s friend, the Marquis of Saint-Hérem?”

“He came to visit us yesterday with his wife. His household is the very pearl of establishments. He invited us to visit his castle just erected in the valley of Chevreuse. They say that no palace in Paris equals it in splendour. It seems that for three years fifteen hundred artisans have been at work on it, without counting the terraces of the park, which alone have employed the force of four villages, and, as the marquis pays handsomely, you can conceive what comfort has been spread abroad through the neighbourhoods around his castle.”

“Well, then, my good Richard, you confess that, if the uncle of the marquis had not had the same avarice

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which you possessed, this generous fellow would not have been able to give work to so many families."

"That is true, my dear doctor, so, under the name of Saint-Ramon, as the marquis has jestingly christened his uncle, the memory of this famous miser is blessed by everybody."

"It is inconceivable, abbé," said the canon, "the doctor must be right. I am confounded with what I hear and with what I see. We are actually going to dine with the seven deadly sins."

"M. Henri David!" said the valet.

At this name the countenance of the doctor became grave; he walked up to David, took both his hands with effusive tenderness, and said:

"Pardon me for having insisted upon your acceptance of this invitation, my dear David, but I promised my excellent friend and pupil, Doctor Dufour, who recommended you to me, to try to divert you during your short sojourn in Paris."

"And I feel the need of these diversions, I assure you, sir. Down there our life is so calm, so regular, that hours slip away unperceived; but here, lost in the turmoil of this great city to which I have become a stranger, I feel these paroxysms of painful sadness, and I thank you a thousand times for having provided for me such an agreeable distraction."

Henri David was talking thus to the doctor when seven o'clock sounded.

The canon uttered a profound sigh of satisfaction as he saw the steward open the folding doors of the dining-room.

CONCLUSION.

AT the moment the guests of the doctor were about to enter the dining-room, the valet announced :

“ Madame the Marquise de Miranda.”

“ Luxury,” whispered the doctor to the abbé. “ I feared she might fail us.”

Then offering his arm to Madeleine, more beautiful, more bewitching than ever, the doctor said, as he conducted her to the dining-room :

“ I had just begun to despair of the good fortune you had promised me, madame. Listen to me, at my age the happiness of seeing you here again you must know is inexpressible. Ah, if I were only fifty years younger !”

“ I would take you for my cavalier, my dear doctor,” said the marquise, laughing extravagantly ; “ I think we have been friends, at the least estimate, for fifty years.”

We will not undertake to enumerate the wonders of the doctor’s elegant dining-room. We will limit ourselves to the menu of this dinner,—a menu which each guest, thanks to a delicate forethought, found under his napkin, between two dozen oysters, one from Ostend and the other from Marennes. This menu was written on white vellum, and encased in a little framework of carved silver leaves enamelled with green. Each guest thus knew how to reserve his appetite for such dishes as he preferred. Let us add only that the size of the table and the dining-room was such that, instead of the narrow and inconvenient chairs which force you to eat, so to speak, with the elbows close to the body, each guest, seated in a large and comfortable chair, the feet on a

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soft carpet, had all the latitude necessary for the evolutions of his knife and fork. Here is the menu which the canon took with a hand trembling with emotion and read religiously.

MENU FOR DINNER.

Four Soups. — Soup à la Condé, rich crab soup with white meat of fowl, soup with kouskoussou, consommé with toast.

Four Relevés of Fish. — Head of sturgeon à la Godard, pieces of eel à l'Italienne, salmon à la Chambord, turbot à la Hollandaise.

Four By-plates. — Croquettes à la royale, morsels of baked lobster tail, soft roe of carps à la Orly, little piès à la reine.

Four Large Dishes. — Quarter of pickled wild boar, ragout of beef from salt meadows, quarter of veal à la Monglas, roast beef from salt meadows.

Sixteen Entrées. — Scalloped roebuck à l'Espagnole, fillet of lamb à la Toulouse, slices of duck with orange, sweetbreads with jelly, sweetmeats of beccaficos à la d'Uxelle, meat pie à la Nesle, macaroni à la Parisienne, hot ortolan pie, fillets of pullet from Mans, woodcocks with choicest seasoning, quails on toast, rabbit cutlets à la maréchale, veal liver with rice, partridge with black pudding à la Richelieu, foie gras à la Provençal, fillet of plover à la Lyonnaise.

Intermediate. — Punch à la Romaine.

Birds. — Pheasants sauced and stuffed with truffles, fowl dressed with slices of bacon, turkey stuffed with truffles from Périgord, grouse.

Ten Side-dishes. — Cardoons with marrow, artichokes à la Napolitaine, broiled mushrooms, Périgord truffles with champagne wine, white truffles of Piedmont with olive oil, eelery à la Française, lobster stewed with Madeira wine, shrimps stewed with kari from the Indies, lettuce with essence of ham, asparagus and peas.

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Two Large Confections. — Candy ship in rose-coloured cream, temple of sugar candy with pistachios.

Chestnuts with frozen apricots, pineapple jelly with fruits, Bavarian cheese frozen with raspberries, whipped cream with cherry jelly, French cream with black coffee, preserved strawberries.

After reading this menu, the canon, carried away with enthusiasm, and forgetting, we must confess, all conventionalities, rose from his chair, took his knife in one hand and his fork in the other, and, stretching out his arm, said, in a solemn voice :

“ Doctor, I swear I will eat it all ! ”

And in fact the canon did eat all.

And still he had an appetite.

It is useless to say that the exquisite wines, whose delicious ambrosia the canon had already tested, circulated in profusion.

At dessert, Doctor Gasterini rose, holding in his hand a little glass of iced wine of Constance, and said :

“ Ladies, I am going to offer an infernal toast,—a toast as diabolical as if we were joyously banqueting among the damned in the lowest depth of the dining-room in the kingdom of Satan.”

“ Oh, oh, dear, amiable doctor ! ” exclaimed all with one voice, “ pray what is this infernal toast ? ”

“ To the seven deadly sins ! ” replied the doctor. “ And now, ladies, permit me to express to you the thought which this toast inspires in me. I promised Abbé Ledoux, who has the honour of being seated by the Marquise de Miranda,— I promised the abbé, I repeat, this man of mind, of experience, and learning, but incredulous,— to prove to him by positive, incontrovertible facts, the good that can be achieved in certain instances, and in a certain measure by these tendencies, instincts, and passions which we name the seven deadly

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sins. The whole problem is to regulate them wisely, and to draw from them the best that is possible. Now, as the Duchess of Senneterre-Maillefort, Madame Florence Michel, and the Marquise de Miranda have for a long time honoured me with their friendship,—as MM. Richard, Yvon Cloarek, and Henri David are my good old friends, I hope that, for the triumph of sound ideas, my amiable guests will have the grace to aid me in rehabilitating these capital sins, that by their excess, owing to the absence of proper control, have been absolutely condemned, and in converting this poor abbé to their possible utility. He sins only through ignorance and obstinacy, it is true, but he does not the less blaspheme these admirable means and sources of energy, happiness, and wealth, which the inexhaustible munificence of the Creator has bestowed upon his creatures. Now, as nothing is more charming than a conversation at dessert, among men of mind, I beg that, in the interest of our unfortunate brother, Abbé Lcdoux, the representatives of these various sins will tell us all that they owe to them, both in their own careers and in the success of others."

The proposition of Doctor Gasterini, unanimously welcomed, was carried out with perfect grace and uninterrupted joyousness. Henri David, who was the last but one to speak, interested the guests keenly in recounting the prodigies of devotion and generosity that Envy had inspired in Frederick Bastien, and even tears flowed at the account of the death of that noble child and that of his angelic mother. Happily the recital of Luxury concluded the dinner, and the lively marquise made the whole company laugh, when speaking of her adventure with the archduke, whose passion she did not share. She said that it was easier to induce the Pope's legate to masquerade as a Hungarian hussar than to make an Austrian archduke comprehend that man was born for liberty. Moreover, the marquise announced that she

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contrived a plan of campaign against the old Radetzki, and finally engaged in transforming him into a coal merchant, and making him one of the chief instruments in the liberation of Italy.

“ But this snow, dear and beautiful marquise,” said the doctor to her, in a low voice, after this recital, “ this armour of ice, which renders you apparently disdainful to those whom you inflame, is it never melted by so many fires ?”

“ No, no, my good doctor,” replied the marquise, softly, with a melancholy smile; “ the memory of my blond archangel, my ideal and only love, keeps the depths of my heart pure and fresh, like a flower under the snow.”

“ And I had remorse !” cried the canon, in a transport of delight over his easy digestion. “ I was miscreant enough to feel remorse for the indulgence of my appetite.”

“ Instead of remorse, an excellent dinner gives, on the contrary, even to the most selfish hearts, a singular inclination to charity,” replied the doctor, “ and if I did not fear I should be anathematised by our critical and dear Abbé Ledoux, I would add that, from the point of view of charity,—from that standpoint, gluttony would have the happiest results.”

“ Go on,” replied the abbé, shrugging his shoulders, as he sipped a little glass of exquisite cream, flavoured with cinnamon of Madame Amphoux, 1788. “ You have already uttered so many absurdities, dear doctor, that one more or less — ”

“ It depends not on chimeras, utopian schemes, but upon facts, palpable, practical, to-day and to-morrow,” interrupted the doctor, “ facts which can pour every day considerable sums in the coffers of the benevolent enterprises of Paris ! Is that an absurdity ? ”

“ Speak, dear doctor,” said the guests, unanimously ; “ speak ! We are all listening to you.”

“ This is what happened,” replied the doctor ; “ and I regret that the thought did not occur to me sooner.

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Three days ago I was walking on one of the boulevards, about six o'clock in the evening. Surprised by a heavy shower, I took refuge in a café, one of the most fashionable restaurants in Paris. I never dine anywhere else than at home, but to keep myself in countenance, and satisfy my desire for observation, I ordered a few dishes which I did not touch, and, while I was waiting for the rain to stop, I amused myself by observing the persons who were dining. There could be a book, and a curious book, too, written upon the different shades of manner, character, and social and other conditions of people who reveal themselves unconsciously at the solemn hour of dinner. But that is not the question. I made this observation only, that each man, as he seated himself at the table, with an air indifferent, anxious, cheerful, or morose, as the case might be, seemed, in proportion as he dined upon excellent dishes, to yield to a sort of beatitude and inward happiness, which was reflected upon his countenance, that faithful mirror of the soul. As I was seated near one of the windows, I followed with my eye each one as he left the café. Outside the door stood a pale, ragged child, shivering under the cold autumn rain. Ah, well, my friends,—I say it to the praise of gourmands,—almost every one of those who had dined the best gave alms to the poor little hungry, trembling creature. Now, without speaking ill of my neighbour, I ask, would these same persons, fasting, have been as charitable? And I venture to affirm that the little beggar would have met with a harsh denial if he had asked them when they entered the café, instead of waiting until they came out."

"Is this pagan going to tell us that charity owes its birth to gluttony?" cried Abbé Ledoux.

"To reply successfully, dear abbé, it would be necessary for me to enter into a physiological discussion upon the subject of the influence of the physical on the moral,"

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said the doctor. "I will tell you one simple thing. You have boxes for the poor at the doors of your churches. No one more than myself respects the charity of those faithful souls who put their rich or modest offering in these sacred places; but why not place alms-boxes in fashionable cafés, where the rich and the happy go to satisfy their refined tastes? Why not, I say, place your poor-boxes in some conspicuous spot, with the simple inscription, "For the hungry?"

"The doctor is right!" shouted the guests. "It is an excellent idea; every great establishment would show large receipts every day."

"And the little establishments also," replied the doctor. "Ah, believe me, my friends, he who has made a modest repast, as well as the opulent diner, feels that compassion which is born of a satisfied want or pleasure, when he thinks of those who are deprived of the satisfaction of this want or this pleasure. Now, then, let me resume: If all the proprietors of these restaurants and cafés would follow my counsel, having an understanding with the members of benevolent enterprises, and would place in some conspicuous spot their poor-boxes, with the words, or others equivalent, "For the hungry," I am convinced, whether from charity, pride, or respect for humanity, you would see alms rain down in them to overflowing. For the most selfish man, who has spent a louis or more for his dinner, feels, in spite of himself, a painful sense of benefits, a sort of bitter after-taste, at the sight of those who suffer. A generous alms absolves him in his own eyes, and from a hygienic point of view, dear canon, this little act of charity would give him a most happy digestion."

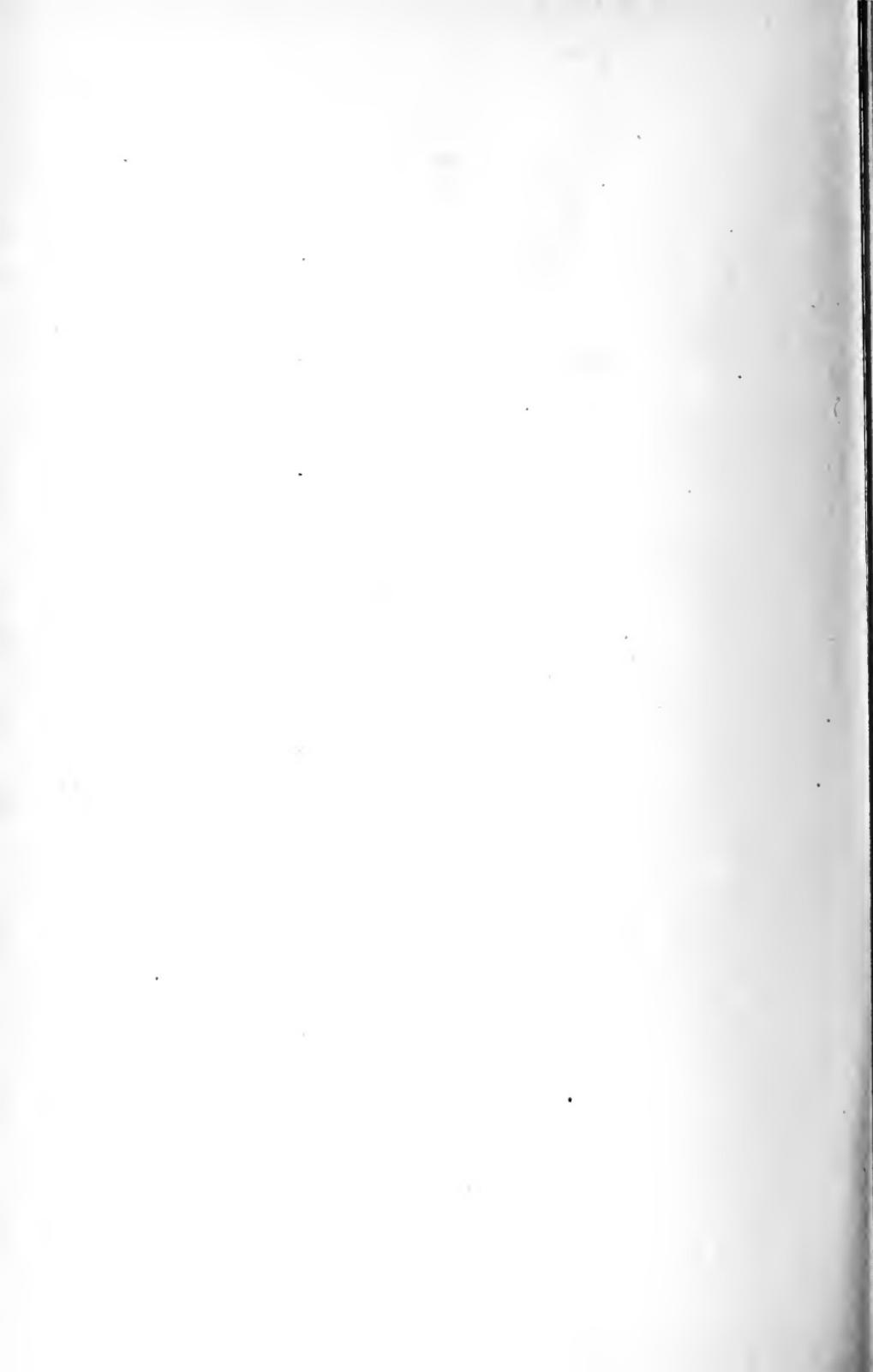
"Doctor, I confess myself vanquished!" cried Abbé Ledoux. "I drink, if not to the seven deadly sins in general, at least, in particular to gluttony."

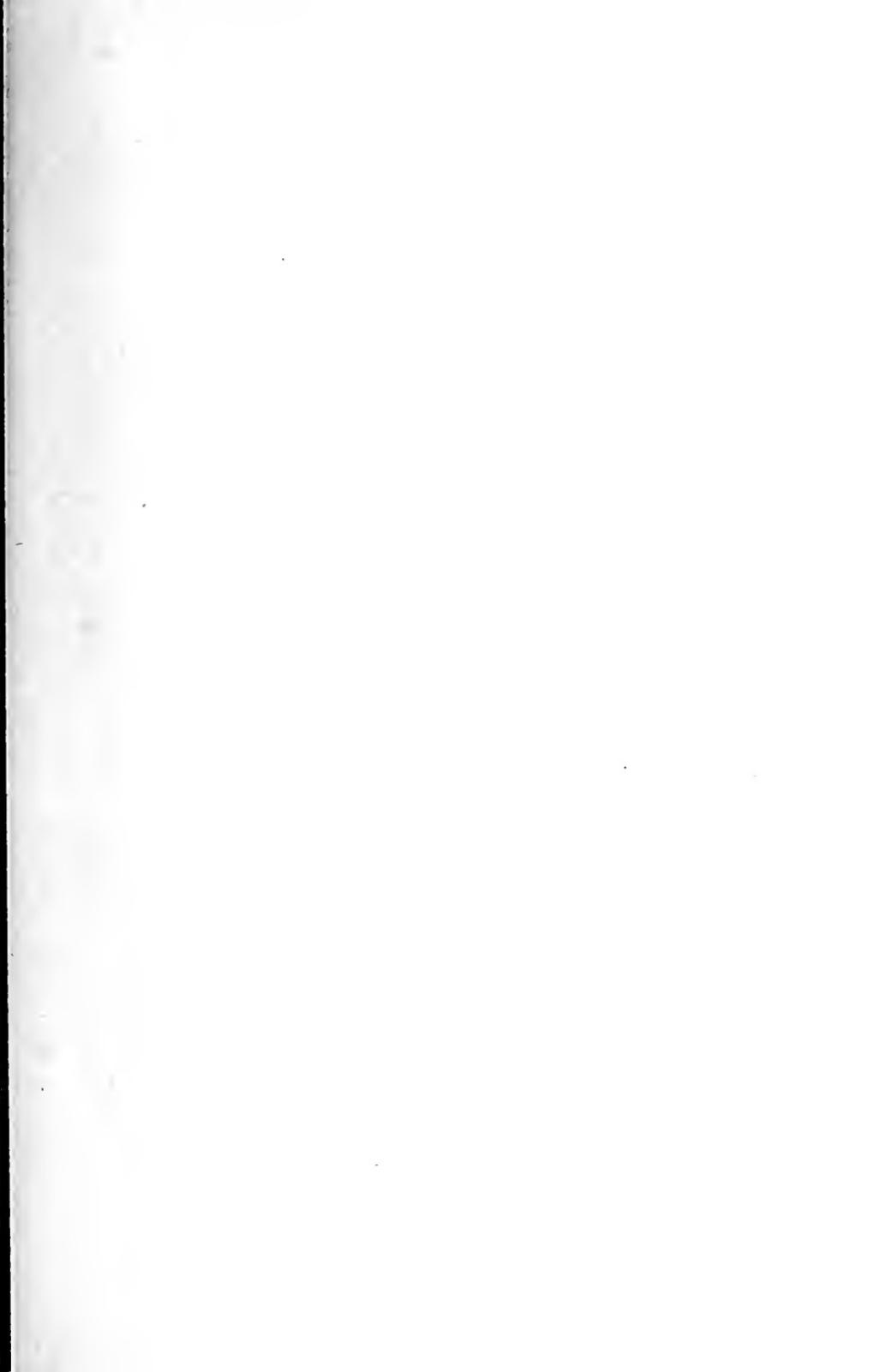
THE END.



THE SEVEN CARDINAL SINS

AVARICE







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AVARICE.

CHAPTER I.

AN UNFORTUNATE CHOICE.

THE narrow street known for many long years as the Charnier des Innocents (the Charnel-house of the Innocents), near the market, has always been noted for the large number of scriveners who have established their booths in this densely populated part of Paris.

One fine morning in the month of May, 18—, a young girl about eighteen years of age, who was clad in working dress, and whose charming though melancholy face wore that peculiar pallor which seems to be a sort of sinister reflection of poverty, was walking thoughtfully down the Charnier des Innocents. Several times she paused as if in doubt in front of as many scriveners' booths, but either because the proprietors seemed too young or too unprepossessing in appearance or too busy, she went slowly on again.

Seeing, in the doorway of the last booth, an old man with a face as good and kind as it was venerable, the young girl did not hesitate to enter the modest little establishment.

The scrivener, struck in his turn by the young girl's remarkable beauty and modest bearing, as well as her timid and melancholy air, greeted her with almost pater-

nal affability as she entered his shop, after which he closed the door; then drawing the curtain of the little window, the good man motioned his client to a seat, while he took possession of his old leather armchair.

Mariette — for that was the young girl's name — lowered her big blue eyes, blushed deeply, and maintained an embarrassed, almost painful, silence for several seconds. Her bosom rose and fell tumultuously under the small gray shawl that she wore over her faded calico gown, while the hands she had clasped in her lap trembled violently.

The old scrivener, anxious to reassure the poor girl, said to her, almost affectionately, "Come, come, my child, compose yourself. Why should you feel this embarrassment? You came to ask me to write some request or petition for you, or, perhaps, a letter, did you not?"

"Yes, monsieur, it was — it was to ask you to write a letter for me that I came."

"Then you do not know how to write?"

"No, monsieur," replied Mariette, blushing still more deeply, as if ashamed of her ignorance, whereupon the scrivener, regretting that he had thus humiliated his client, said, kindly :

"You certainly cannot suppose me capable of blaming you for your ignorance. On the contrary, it is a sincere compassion I feel for persons who, for want of an education, are compelled to come to me, to apply to a third party, who may betray their confidence, and, perhaps, even ridicule them! And yet they are compelled to confide their dearest and most secret thoughts to these strangers. It is very hard, is it not?"

"It is, indeed, monsieur," replied Mariette, touched by these words. "To be obliged to apply to a stranger to —"

The young girl did not finish the sentence, but blushed deeply, and her eyes filled with tears.

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Gazing at his youthful client with even greater interest, the scrivener said :

“ Do not be so troubled, my child. You have neither garrulosity nor ridicule to fear from me. I have always regarded as something indescribably touching and sacred the confidence which persons who have been deprived of the advantages of an education are obliged to repose in me.”

Then, with a kindly smile, he added : “ But pray do not suppose for one moment, mademoiselle, that I say this to glorify myself at the expense of my *confreres*, and to get their clients away from them. No, I am saying exactly what I think and feel ; and at my age, one certainly may be allowed to do that.”

Mariette, more and more surprised at the old man’s words, said, gratefully :

“ I thank you, monsieur ; you relieve me very much by thus understanding and excusing my embarrassment. It is very hard not to know how to read and write,” she added, sighing, “ but, alas ! very often one cannot help it.”

“ I am sure, my poor child, that in your case, as in the case of many other young girls who apply to me, it is not the good-will but the opportunity that is lacking. Many of these young girls, from being obliged to take care of their young brothers and sisters while their parents are busy away from home, have had no chance to attend school. Others were apprenticed at an early age — ”

“ Like myself, monsieur,” said Mariette, smiling. “ I was apprenticed when I was only nine years old, and up to that time I had been obliged to remain at home and take care of a little brother, who died a short time before my father and mother.”

“ Poor child ! your history is very similar to that of most young girls of your station in life. But, since your term of apprenticeship expired, have you made no effort to acquire a little education ? ”

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" Since that time I have had to work all day and far into the night to earn enough to keep my godmother and myself alive, monsieur," said Mariette, sadly.

" Alas! yes, time is bread to the labourer, and only too often he has to choose whether he shall die of hunger or live in ignorance."

Then, becoming more and more interested, he added : " You spoke of your godmother just now ; so your father and mother are both dead, I suppose ? "

" Yes, as I told you a little while ago," replied Mariette, sadly. " But pardon me, monsieur, for taking up so much of your time instead of telling you at once what I want you to write for me."

" I am sure my time could not have been better spent, for I am an old man, and I have had a good deal of experience, and I feel sure that you are a good and worthy girl. But now about the letter. Do you prefer to give me a rough idea of what you wish to write and let me put it in my own words, or do you prefer to dictate the letter ? "

" I would rather dictate it, monsieur."

" Then I am ready," said the old man, putting on his spectacles, and seating himself at his desk with his eyes fixed upon the paper so as not to increase his client's embarrassment by looking at her.

So, after a moment's hesitation, Mariette, with downcast eyes, proceeded to dictate, as follows :

" Monsieur Louis."

On hearing this name, the old scrivener made a slight movement of surprise,—a fact that was not noticed by Mariette, who repeated, in a less trembling voice this time, " Monsieur Louis."

" I have written that," said the scrivener, still without looking at Mariette, whereupon the latter continued, hesitating every now and then, for, in spite of her confidence in the old man, it was no easy matter to reveal her secret thoughts to him :

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"I am greatly troubled, for I have heard nothing from you, though you promised to write me while you were away."

"While you were away," repeated the scrivener, whose face had suddenly become thoughtful, and who was saying to himself, with a vague anxiety : "This is a singular coincidence. His name is Louis, and he is away."

"I hope you are well, M. Louis," Mariette continued, "and that it is not on account of any illness that you have not written to me, for then I should have two causes of anxiety instead of one."

"To-day is the sixth of May, M. Louis, the sixth of May, so I could not let the day pass without writing to you. Perhaps the same thought will occur to you, and that day after to-morrow I shall receive a letter from you, as you will receive one from me. Then I shall know that it was not on account of forgetfulness or sickness that you have delayed writing to me so long. In that case, how happy I shall be! So I shall wait for day after to-morrow with great impatience. Heaven grant that I may not be disappointed, M. Louis."

Mariette stifled a sigh as she uttered these last words, and a tear rolled down her cheek.

A long pause followed. The features of the scrivener who was bending over his desk could not be seen by the young girl, but they were assuming a more and more anxious expression ; and two or three times he tried to steal a furtive glance at his client, as if the interest he had felt in her had given place to a sort of distrust caused by grave apprehensions on his part.

The young woman, keeping her eyes still fixed upon her lap, continued :

"I have no news to tell you, M. Louis. My godmother is still very ill. Her sufferings seem to increase, and that renders her much more irritable. In order that I may be with her as much as possible, I sew at home now most of the time, instead of going to Madame Jourdan's,

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so the days seem long and gloomy ; for the work done in the shop with my companions was almost a pleasure, and seemed to progress much more rapidly. So I am obliged to work far into the night now, and do not get much sleep, as my godmother suffers much more at night than in the daytime, and requires a great deal of attention from me. Sometimes I do not even wake when she calls me because I am so dead with sleep, and then she scolds, which is very natural when she suffers so.

“ You can understand, of course, that my life at home is not very happy, and that a friendly word from you would be a great comfort, and console me for many things that are very unpleasant.

“ Good-bye, M. Louis. I expected to have written to you through Augustine, but she has gone back to her home now, and I have been obliged to apply to another person, to whom I have dictated this letter. Ah, M. Louis, never have I realised the misfortune of not knowing how to read or write as much as I do at this present time.

“ Farewell, M. Louis, think of me, I beg of you, for I am always thinking of you.

“ With sincere affection I once more bid you adieu.”

As the young girl remained silent for a minute or two after these words, the old man turned to her and asked :

“ Is that all, my child ? ”

“ Yes, monsieur.”

“ And what name is to be signed to this letter ? ”

“ The name of Mariette, monsieur.”

“ Mariette only ? ”

“ Mariette Moreau, if you think best, monsieur. That is my family name.”

“ Signed, Mariette Moreau,” said the old man, writing the name as he spoke.

Then, having folded the letter, he asked, concealing the secret anxiety with which he awaited the girl’s reply :

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“To whom is this letter to be addressed, my child ?”

“To M. Louis Richard. General delivery, Dreux.”

“I thought as much,” secretly groaned the old man, as he prepared to write the address Mariette had just given him.

If the young girl had not been so deeply preoccupied she could hardly have failed to notice the change in the expression of the scrivener’s face,—a change which became still more noticeable when he discovered for a certainty for whom this missive was intended. It was with a look of positive anger now that he furtively watched Mariette, and he seemed unable to make up his mind to write the address she had just given him, for after having written upon the envelope the words, “To Monsieur,” he dropped his pen, and said to his client, forcing a smile in order to conceal alike his resentment and his apprehensions :

“Now, my child, though this is the first time we ever saw each other, it seems to me you feel you can trust me a little already.”

“That is true, monsieur. Before I came here, I feared I should not have the courage to dictate my letter to an entire stranger, but your manner was so kind that I soon got over my embarrassment.”

“I certainly see no reason why you should feel the slightest embarrassment. If I were your own father, I could not find a word of fault with the letter you have just written to — to M. Louis, and if I were not afraid of abusing the confidence you say that you have in me, I should ask — but no, that would be too inquisitive.”

“You would ask me what, monsieur ?”

“Who this M. Louis Richard is ?”

“That is no secret, monsieur. M. Louis is the clerk of a notary whose office is in the same building as the shop in which I work. It was in this way that we became acquainted on the sixth of May, just one year ago to-day.”

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"Ah! I understand now why you laid such stress upon that date in your letter."

"Yes, monsieur."

"And you love each other, I suppose,—don't blush so, child,—and expect to marry some day, probably?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"And M. Louis's family consents to the marriage?"

"M. Louis has no one but his father to consult, and we hope he will not refuse his consent."

"And the young man's father, what kind of a person is he?"

"The best of fathers, M. Louis says, and bears his present poverty with great courage and cheerfulness, though he used to be very well off. M. Louis and his father are as poor now, though, as my godmother and I are. That makes us hope that he will not oppose our marriage."

"And your godmother, my child,—it seems to me she must be a great trial to you."

"When one suffers all the time, and has never had anything but misfortunes all one's life, it is very natural that one should not be very sweet tempered."

"Your godmother is an invalid, then?"

"She has lost one of her hands, monsieur, and she has a lung trouble that has confined her to the bed for more than a year."

"Lost her hand,—how?"

"She used to work in a mattress factory, monsieur, and one day she ran a long, crooked needle into her hand. The wound became inflamed from want of care, for my godmother had not time to give it the attention it should have had, and the doctors were obliged to cut her arm off. The wound reopens now and then, and causes her a great deal of pain."

"Poor woman!" murmured the scrivener, absently.

"As for the lung trouble she has," continued Mariette, "many women who follow that trade contract the disease,

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the doctors say, from breathing the unwholesome dust from the old mattresses they make over. My godmother is bent almost double, and nearly every night she has such terrible fits of coughing that I have to hold her for hours, sometimes."

"And your godmother has nothing but your earnings to depend on?"

"She cannot work now, monsieur, of course."

"Such devotion on your part is very generous, I must say."

"I am only doing my duty, monsieur. My godmother took care of me after my parents died, and paid for a three years' apprenticeship for me. But for her, I should not be in a position to earn my living, so it is only right that she should profit now by the assistance she gave me years ago."

"But you must have to work very hard to support her and yourself?"

"Yes; I have to work from fifteen to eighteen hours a day, monsieur."

"And at night you have to nurse her instead of taking the rest you so much need?"

"Who else would nurse her, monsieur?"

"But why doesn't she try to get into some hospital?"

"They will not take her into a hospital because the lung trouble she has is incurable. Besides, I could not desert her like that."

"Ah, well, my child, I see that I was not mistaken. You are a good, noble-hearted girl, there is no doubt of it," added the old man, holding out his hand to Mariette.

As he did, either through awkwardness, or intentionally, the scrivener overturned the inkstand that stood on his desk in such a way that a good part of the contents ran over the letter, which lacked only the address to complete it.

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"Good heavens! How unfortunate, the letter is covered with ink, monsieur!" exclaimed Mariette.

"How awkward in me!" responded the old man, with a disgusted air. "Still, it doesn't matter very much, after all. It was a short letter. I write very rapidly, and it will not take me more than ten minutes to copy it for you, my child. At the same time, I will read it aloud so you can see if there is any change you would like to make in it."

"I am truly sorry to give you so much trouble, monsieur."

"It serves me right, as it was all my fault," responded the old man, cheerfully.

And he began to read the letter aloud as he wrote, exactly as if he were recopying it, as he proceeded with the reading. Nevertheless, from the scrivener's manner it seemed evident that a violent struggle was going on in his breast, for sometimes he sighed and knit his brows, sometimes he seemed confused and kept his eyes sedulously averted from the ingenuous face of Mariette, who sat with one elbow resting upon the table, and her head supported on her hand, watching with envious eyes the rapid movements of the old man's pen, as it traced characters which were undecipherable to her, but which would, as she fondly supposed, convey her thoughts to the man she loved.

The young girl expressing no desire to make the slightest change in her artless missive, the scrivener handed it to her after having carefully sealed it.

"And now, monsieur, how much do I owe you?" timidly inquired the girl, drawing a little purse containing two small silver coins and a few sous from her pocket.

"Fifty centimes," replied the old man after a moment's hesitation, remembering, perhaps, that it was at the cost of a day's bread that the poor girl was writing to her lover; "fifty centimes," repeated the scrivener, "for you

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understand, of course, my child, that I expect you to pay for only one of the letters I have written. I alone am responsible for my awkwardness."

" You are certainly very honest, monsieur," said Mariette, touched by what she considered a proof of generosity on the part of the scrivener. Then, after having paid for her letter, she added :

" You have been so kind to me, monsieur, that I shall venture to ask a favour of you."

" Speak, my child."

" If I have any other letters to write, it would be almost impossible for me to apply to any one but you, monsieur."

" I shall be at your service."

" But this is not all, monsieur. My godmother is as I am. She can neither read nor write. I had a friend I could depend upon, but she is out of town. In case I should receive a letter from M. Louis, would you be kind enough to read it to me ?"

" Certainly, my child. I will read your letters to you with pleasure. Bring them all to me," replied the old man, with much inward gratification. " It is I who should thank you for the confidence you manifest in me. I hope I shall soon see you again, and that you leave here much more easy in mind than when you came."

" I certainly could not expect such kindness as you have shown me from any one else."

" Farewell, then, my child, and be sure that you consider me your reader and secretary henceforth. It really seems as if we must have known each other a dozen years."

" That is true, monsieur. *Au revoir.*"

" *Au revoir*, my child."

Mariette had hardly left the booth when a postman appeared in the doorway, and holding out a letter to the old scrivener, said, cordially :

" Here, Father Richard, is a letter from Dreux."

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“A letter from Dreux!” exclaimed the old man, seizing it eagerly. “Thank you, my friend.” Then, examining the handwriting, he said to himself: “It is from Ramon! What is he going to tell me? What does he think of my son? Ah! what is going to become of all the fine plans Ramon and I formed so long ago?”

“There are six sous to pay on it, Father Richard,” said the postman, arousing the old scrivener from his reverie.

“Six sous! the devil! isn’t it prepaid?”

“Look at the stamp, Father Richard.”

“True,” said the scrivener, sighing heavily, as he reluctantly drew the ten sous piece he had just received from his pocket and handed it to the postman.

While this was going on, Mariette was hastening homeward.

CHAPTER II.

A TOUCHING EXAMPLE OF UNSELFISH DEVOTION.

MARIETTE soon reached the gloomy and sombre thoroughfare known as the Rue des Prêtres St. Germain-l'Auxerrois, and entered one of the houses opposite the grim walls of the church. After traversing a dark alley, the girl began to climb a rickety stairway as dark as the alley itself, for the only light came through a courtyard so narrow that it reminded one of a well.

The porter's room was on the first landing only a few steps from the stairway, and Mariette, pausing there, said to the woman who occupied it :

“ Madame Justin, did you have the goodness to go up and see if my godmother wanted anything ? ”

“ Yes, Mlle. Mariette, I took her milk up to her, but she was in such a bad humour that she treated me like a dog. Had it not been for obliging you, I would have let the old crosspatch alone, I can tell you.”

“ You must not be too hard on her, Madame Justin ; she suffers so much.”

“ Oh, you are always making excuses for her, I know. It shows how good-hearted you are, but it doesn't prevent your godmother from being a hateful old thing. Poor child, you certainly are having your purgatory in advance. If there is no paradise for you hereafter you will certainly be cheated out of your rightful dues. But wait a minute, I have a letter for you.”

“ A letter ? ” exclaimed Mariette, her heart throbbing

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with relief and hope, “a letter from some one out of the city ?”

“Yes, mademoiselle, it is postmarked Dreux, and there are six sous to pay on it. Here it is, and see, on the corner of the envelope the writer has put the words, ‘Very urgent.’ ”

Mariette seized the letter and slipped it into her bosom ; then, drawing out her little purse again, she took from it her last ten sous piece and paid the woman, after which she hastened up to her room, pleased and at the same time anxious and sad ; pleased at having received a letter from Louis, anxious concerning the significance of those words, “Very urgent,” written in a corner of the envelope, and sad because several hours must elapse before she would know the contents of the letter, for she dared not absent herself again after having left her godmother alone so long.

It was with a sort of dread that she finally opened the door of the room on the fifth floor that she occupied with her godmother. The poor woman was lying on the only bed the two women possessed. A thin mattress now rolled up out of the way in a corner, but laid on the floor at night, served as a bed for Mariette. A table, an old bureau, two chairs, a few cooking utensils hanging on the wall near the fireplace, were the only articles of furniture in the dimly lighted room, but everything was scrupulously clean.

Madame Lacombe — for that was the invalid’s name — was a tall, frightfully pale, and emaciated woman, about fifty years of age, with a peevish, disagreeable face. Bent nearly double in the bed, one could see of her only her mutilated arm swathed in bandages, and her irascible face, surrounded by an old cap from which a wisp of gray hair crept out here and there, while her bluish lips were continually distorted by a bitter and sardonic smile.

Madame Lacombe seemed to be suffering greatly. At

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all events she was in an execrable temper, and her hollow eyes gleamed ominously. Making an effort to turn herself in bed, so as to get a look at her godchild, she exclaimed, wrathfully :

“ Where on earth have you been all this time, you gadabout ? ”

“ I have been gone barely an hour, godmother.”

“ And you hoped to find me dead when you got back, didn’t you, now ? Oh, you needn’t deny it. You’ve had enough of me, yes, too much. The day my coffin lid is screwed down will be a happy day for you, and for me, too, for it is too bad, too bad for any one to have to suffer as I do,” added the poor woman, pressing her hand upon her bosom, and groaning heavily.

Mariette dried the tears her godmother’s sarcastic words had excited, and approaching the sufferer, said, gently :

“ You had such a bad night last night that I hoped you would be more comfortable to-day and get a little sleep while I was out.”

“ If I suffer or if I starve to death it makes no difference to you, evidently, provided you can run the streets.”

“ I went out this morning because I was absolutely obliged to, godmother, but before I left I asked Madame Justin — ”

“ I’d as lief see a death’s-head as that creature, so when you want to get rid of me you have only to send her to wait on me.”

“ Shall I dress your arm, godmother ? ”

“ No, it is too late for that now. You stayed away on purpose. I know you did.”

“ I am sorry I was late, but won’t you let me dress it now ? ”

“ I wish to heaven you would leave me in peace.”

“ But your arm will get worse if you don’t have it dressed.”

“ And that is exactly what you want.”

“Oh, godmother, don’t say that, I beg of you.”

“Don’t come near me! I won’t have it dressed, I say.”

“Very well, godmother,” replied the girl, sighing. Then she added, “I asked Madame Justin to bring up your milk. Here it is. Would you like me to warm it a little?”

“Milk? milk? I’m tired of milk! The very thought of it makes me sick at my stomach. The doctor said I was to have good strong bouillon, with a chop and a bit of chicken now and then. I had some Monday and Wednesday.—but this is Sunday.”

“It is not my fault, godmother. I know the doctor ordered it, but one must have money to follow his directions, and it is almost impossible for me to earn twenty sous a day now.”

“You don’t mind spending money on clothes, I’m sure. When my comfort is concerned it is a very different thing.”

“But I have had nothing but this calico dress all winter, godmother,” answered Mariette, with touching resignation. “I economise all I can, and we owe two months’ rent for all that.”

“That means I am a burden to you, I suppose. And yet I took you in out of the street, and had you taught a trade, you ungrateful, hard-hearted minx!”

“No, godmother, I am not ungrateful. When you are not feeling as badly as you are now you are more just to me,” replied Mariette, restraining her tears; “but don’t insist upon going without eating any longer. It will make you feel so badly.”

“I know it. I’ve got dreadful cramps in my stomach now.”

“Then take your milk, I beg of you, godmother.”

“I won’t do anything of the kind! I hate milk, I tell you.”

“Shall I go out and get you a couple of fresh eggs?”

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“No, I want some chicken.”

“But, godmother, I can’t—”

“Can’t what?”

“Buy chicken on credit.”

“I only want a half or a quarter of one. You had twenty-four sous in your purse this morning.”

“That is true, godmother.”

“Then go to the *rotisseur* and buy me a quarter of a chicken.”

“But, godmother, I — ”

“Well ?”

“I haven’t that much money any longer, I have only a few sous left.”

“And those two ten sous pieces ; what became of them ?”

“Godmother — ”

“Where are those two ten sous pieces, tell me ?”

“I — I don’t know,” repeated the poor girl, blushing. “They must have slipped out of my purse. I — I — ”

“You lie. You are blushing as red as a beet.”

“I assure you — ”

“Yes, yes, I see,” sneered the sick woman, “while I am lying here on my death-bed you have been stuffing yourself with dainties.”

“But, godmother — ”

“Get out of my sight, get out of my sight, I tell you ! Let me lie here and starve if you will, but don’t let me ever lay eyes on you again ! You were very anxious for me to drink that milk ! There was poison in it, I expect, I am such a burden to you.”

At this accusation, which was as absurd as it was atrocious, Mariette stood for a moment silent and motionless, not understanding at first the full meaning of those horrible words ; but when she did, she recoiled, clasping her hands in positive terror ; then, unable to restrain her tears, and yielding to an irresistible impulse, she threw herself on the sick woman’s neck, twined her arms

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around her, and covering her face with tears and kisses, exclaimed, wildly :

“ Oh, godmother, godmother, how can you ? ”

This despairing protest against a charge which could have originated only in a disordered brain restored the invalid to her senses, and, realising the injustice of which she had been guilty, she, too, burst into tears ; then taking one of Mariette’s hands in one of hers, and trying to press the young girl to her breast with the other, she said, soothingly :

“ Come, come, child, don’t cry so. What a silly creature you are ! Can’t you see that I was only joking ? ”

“ True, godmother, I was very stupid to think you could be in earnest,” replied Mariette, passing the back of her hand over her eyes to dry her tears, “ but really I couldn’t help it.”

“ You ought to have more patience with your poor godmother, Mariette,” replied the sick woman, sadly. “ When I suffer so it seems as if I can hardly contain myself.”

“ I know it, I know it, godmother ! It is easy enough to be just and amiable when one is happy, while you, poor dear, have never known what happiness is.”

“ That is true,” said the sick woman, feeling a sort of cruel satisfaction in justifying her irritability by an enumeration of her grievances, “ that is true. Many persons may have had a lot like mine, but no one ever had a worse one. Beaten as an apprentice, beaten by my husband until he drank himself to death, I have dragged my ball and chain along for fifty years, without ever having known a single happy day.”

“ Poor godmother, I understand only too well how much you must have suffered.”

“ No, child, no, you cannot understand, though you have known plenty of trouble in your short life ; but you are pretty, and when you have on a fresh white cap, with

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a little bow of pink ribbon on your hair, and you look at yourself in the glass, you have a few contented moments, I know."

"But listen, godmother, I — "

"It is some comfort, I tell you. Come, child, be honest now, and admit that you are pleased, and a little proud too, when people turn to look at you, in spite of your cheap frock and your clumsy laced shoes."

"Oh, so far as that is concerned, godmother, I always feel ashamed, somehow, when I see people looking at me. When I used to go to the workroom there was a man who came to see Madame Jourdan, and who was always looking at me, but I just hated it."

"Oh, yes, but for all that it pleases you way down in your secret heart; and when you get old you will have something pleasant to think of, while I have not. I can't even remember that I was ever young, and, so far as looks are concerned, I was always so ugly that I never could bear to look in the glass, and I could get no husband except an old drunkard who used to beat me within an inch of my life. I didn't even have a chance to enjoy myself after his death, either, for I had a big bill at the wine-shop to pay for him. Then, as if I had not trouble enough, I must needs lose my health and become unable to work, so I should have died of starvation, but for you."

"Come, come, godmother, you're not quite just," said Mariette, anxious to dispel Madame Lacombe's ill-humour. "To my certain knowledge, you have had at least one happy day in your life."

"Which day, pray?"

"The day when, at my mother's death, you took me into your home out of charity."

"Well?"

"Well, did not the knowledge that you had done such a noble deed please you? Wasn't that a happy day for you, godmother?"

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" You call that a happy day, do you ? On the contrary it was one of the very worst days I ever experienced."

" Why, godmother ? " exclaimed the girl, reproachfully.

" It was, for my good-for-nothing husband having died, as soon as his debts were paid I should have had nobody to think of but myself ; but after I took you, it was exactly the same as if I were a widow with a child to support, and that is no very pleasant situation for a woman who finds it all she can do to support herself. But you were so cute and pretty with your curly head and big blue eyes, and you looked so pitiful kneeling beside your mother's coffin, that I hadn't the heart to let you go to the Foundling Asylum. What a night I spent asking myself what I should do about you, and what would become of you if I should get out of work. If I had been your own mother, Mariette, I couldn't have been more worried, and here you are talking about that having been a happy day for me. No ; if I had been well off, it would have been very different ! I should have said to myself : ' There is no danger, the child will be provided for.' But to take a child without any hope of bettering its condition is a very serious thing."

" Poor godmother ! " said the young girl, deeply affected. Then smiling through her tears in the hope of cheering the sick woman, she added :

" Ah, well, we won't talk of days, then, but of moments, for I'm going to convince you that you have at least been happy for that brief space of time, as at this present moment, for instance."

" This present moment ? "

" Yes, I'm sure you must be pleased to see that I have stopped crying, thanks to the kind things you have been saying to me."

But the sick woman shook her head sadly.

" When I get over a fit of ill-temper like that I had

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just now, do you know what I say to myself?" she asked.

"What is it, godmother?"

"I say to myself: 'Mariette is a good girl, I know, but I am always so disagreeable and unjust to her that way down in the depths of her heart she must hate me, and I deserve it.'"

"Come, come, godmother, why will you persist in dwelling upon that unpleasant subject, godmother?" said the girl, reproachfully.

"You must admit that I am right, and I do not say this in any faultfinding way, I assure you. It would be perfectly natural. You are obliged almost to kill yourself working for me, you nurse me and wait on me, and I repay you with abuse and hard words. My death will, indeed, be a happy release for you, poor child. The sooner the undertaker comes for me, the better."

"You said, just now, that when you were talking of such terrible things it was only in jest, and I take it so now," responded Mariette, again trying to smile, though it made her heart bleed to see the invalid relapsing into this gloomy mood again; but the latter, touched by the grieved expression of the girl's features, said:

"Well, as I am only jesting, don't put on such a solemn look. Come, get out the chafing-dish and make me some milk soup. While the milk is warming, you can dress my arm."

Mariette seemed as pleased with these concessions on the part of her godmother as if the latter had conferred some great favour upon her. Hastening to the cupboard she took from a shelf the last bit of bread left in the house, crumbled it in a saucepan of milk, lighted the lamp under the chafing-dish, and then returned to the invalid, who now yielded the mutilated arm to her ministrations, and in spite of the repugnance which such a wound could not fail to inspire, Mariette dressed it with as much dexterity as patience.

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The amiability and devotion of the young girl, as well as her tender solicitude, touched the heart of Madame Lacombe, and when the unpleasant task was concluded, she remarked :

“Talk about Sisters of Charity, there is not one who deserves half as much praise as you do, child.”

“Do not say that, godmother. Do not the good sisters devote their lives to caring for strangers, while you are like a mother to me? I am only doing my duty. I don’t deserve half as much credit as they do.”

“Yes, my poor Mariette, I would talk about my affection for you. It is a delightful thing. I positively made you weep awhile ago, and I shall be sure to do the same thing again to-morrow.”

Mariette, to spare herself the pain of replying to her godmother’s bitter words, went for the soup, which the invalid seemed to eat with considerable enjoyment after all, for it was not until she came to the last spoonful that she exclaimed :

“But now I think of it, child, what are you going to eat?”

“Oh, I have already breakfasted, godmother,” replied the poor little deceiver. “I bought a roll this morning, and ate it as I walked along. But let me arrange your pillow for you. You may drop off to sleep, perhaps, you had such a bad night.”

“But you were awake even more than I was.”

“Nonsense! I am no sleepyhead, and being kept awake a little doesn’t hurt me. There, don’t you feel more comfortable now?”

“Yes, very much. Thank you, my child.”

“Then I will take my work and sit over there by the window. It is so dark to-day, and my work is particular.”

“What are you making?”

“Such an exquisite chemise of the finest linen lawn, godmother. Madame Jourdan told me I must be very careful with it. The lace alone I am to put on it is

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worth two hundred francs, which will make the cost of each garment at least three hundred francs, and there are two dozen of them to be made. They are for some kept woman, I believe," added Mariette, naïvely.

The sick woman gave a sarcastic laugh.

"What are you laughing at, godmother?" inquired the girl, in surprise.

"A droll idea that just occurred to me."

"And what was it, godmother?" inquired Mariette, rather apprehensively, for she knew the usual character of Madame Lacombe's pleasantries.

"I was thinking how encouraging it was to virtue that an honest girl like yourself, who has only two or three patched chemises to her back, should be earning twenty sous a day by making three hundred franc chemises for— Oh, well, work away, child, I'll try to dream of a rest from my sufferings."

And the sick woman turned her face to the wall and said no more.

Fortunately, Mariette was too pure-hearted, and too preoccupied as well, to feel the bitterness of her godmother's remark, and when the sick woman turned her back upon her the girl drew the very urgent letter the portress had given her from her bosom, and laid it in her lap where she could gaze at it now and then as she went on with her sewing.

CHAPTER III.

A SHAMEFUL DECEPTION.

DISCOVERING, a little while afterward, that her godmother was asleep, Mariette, who up to that time had kept the letter from Louis Richard — the scrivener's only son — carefully concealed in her lap, broke the seal and opened the missive. An act of vain curiosity on her part, for, as we have said, the poor girl could not read. But it was a touching sight to see her eagerly gaze at these, to her, incomprehensible characters.

She perceived with a strange mingling of anxiety and hope that the letter was very short. But did this communication, which was marked "Very urgent" on a corner of the envelope, contain good or bad news?

Mariette, with her eyes riveted upon these hieroglyphics, lost herself in all sorts of conjectures, rightly thinking that so short a letter after so long a separation must contain something of importance, — either an announcement of a speedy return, or bad news which the writer had no time to explain in full.

Under these circumstances, poor Mariette experienced one of the worst of those trials to which persons who have been deprived of the advantages of even a rudimentary education are exposed. To hold in one's hand lines that may bring you either joy or sorrow, and yet be unable to learn the secret! To be obliged to wait until you can ask a stranger to read these lines and until you can hear from other lips the news upon which your very life depends, — is this not hard?

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At last this state of suspense became so intolerable that, seeing her godmother continued to sleep, she resolved, even at the risk of being cruelly blamed on her return,—for Madame Lacombe's good-natured fits were rare,—to hasten back to the scrivener; so she cautiously rose from her chair so as not to wake the sick woman, and tiptoed to the door, but just as she reached it a bitter thought suddenly checked her.

She could not have the scrivener read her letter without asking him to reply to it. At least it was more than probable that the contents of the letter would necessitate an immediate reply, consequently she would be obliged to pay the old man, and Mariette no longer possessed even sufficient money to buy bread for the day, and the baker, to whom she already owed twenty francs, would positively refuse, she knew, to trust her further. Her week's earnings which had only amounted to five francs, as her godmother had taken up so much of her time, had been nearly all spent in paying a part of the rent and the washerwoman, leaving her, in fact, only twenty-five sous, most of which had been used in defraying the expenses of her correspondence with Louis, an extravagance for which the poor child now reproached herself in view of her godmother's pressing needs.

One may perhaps smile at the harsh reprimandings to which she had been subjected on account of this trifling expenditure, but, alas! twenty sous does not seem a trifling sum to the poor, an increase or decrease of that amount in their daily or even weekly earnings often meaning life or death, sickness or health, to the humble toiler for daily bread.

To save further expense, Mariette thought for a moment of asking the portress to read the letter for her, but the poor girl was so shy and sensitive, and feared the rather coarse, though good-natured woman's raillery so much, that she finally decided she would rather make almost any sacrifice than apply to her. She had one quite

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pretty dress which she had bought at a second-hand clothes store and refitted for herself, a dress which she kept for great occasions and which she had worn the few times she had gone on little excursions with Louis. With a heavy sigh, she placed the dress, together with a small silk fichu, in a basket to take it to the pawnbroker; and with the basket in her hand, and walking very cautiously so as not to wake her godmother, the girl approached the door, but just as she again reached it Madame Lacombe made a slight movement, and murmured, drowsily :

“ She’s going out again, I do believe, and — ”

But she fell asleep again without finishing the sentence.

Mariette stood for a moment silent and motionless, then opening the door with great care she stole out, locking it behind her and removing the key, which she left in the porter’s room as she passed. She then hastened to the Mont de Piété, where they loaned her fifty sous on her dress and fichu, and, armed with this money, Mariette flew back to the Charnier des Innocents to find the scrivener.

Since Mariette’s departure, and particularly since he had read the letter received from Dreux that morning, the old man had been reflecting with increasing anxiety on the effect this secret which he had discovered by the merest chance would have upon certain projects of his own. He was thus engaged when he saw the same young girl suddenly reappear at the door of his shop, whereupon, without concealing his surprise, though he did not betray the profound uneasiness his client’s speedy return caused him, the scrivener said :

“ What is it, my child ? I did not expect you back so soon.”

“ Here is a letter from M. Louis, sir,” said the young girl, drawing the precious missive from her bosom, “ and I have come to ask you to read it to me.”

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Trembling with anxiety and curiosity, the girl waited as the scrivener glanced over the brief letter, concealing with only a moderate degree of success the genuine consternation its contents excited ; then, uttering an exclamation of sorrowful indignation, he, to Mariette's intense bewilderment and dismay, tore the precious letter in several pieces.

"Poor child ! poor child !" he exclaimed, throwing the fragments under his desk, after having crumpled them in his hands.

"What are you doing, monsieur ?" cried Mariette, pale as death.

"Ah, my poor child !" repeated the old man, with an air of deep compassion.

"Good heavens ! Has any misfortune befallen M. Louis ?" murmured the girl, clasping her hands imploringly.

"No, my child, no ; but you must forget him."

"Forget him ?"

"Yes ; believe me, it would be much better for you to renounce all hope, so far as he is concerned."

"My God ! What has happened to him ?"

"There are some things that are much harder to bear than ignorance, and yet I was pitying you a little while ago because you could not read."

"But what did he say in the letter, monsieur ?"

"Your marriage is no longer to be thought of."

"Did M. Louis say that ?"

"Yes, at the same time appealing to your generosity of heart."

"M. Louis bids me renounce him, and says he renounces me ?"

"Alas ! yes, my poor child. Come, come, summon up all your courage and resignation."

Mariette, who had turned as pale as death, was silent for a moment, while big tears rolled down her cheeks ; then, stooping suddenly, she gathered up the crumpled

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fragments of the letter and handed them to the scrivener, saying, in a husky voice :

“ I at least have the courage to hear all. Put the pieces together and read the letter to me, if you please, monsieur.”

“ Do not insist, my child, I beg of you.”

“ Read it, monsieur, in pity read it!”

“ But — ”

“ I must know the contents of this letter, however much the knowledge may pain me.”

“ I have already told you the substance of it. Spare yourself further pain.”

“ Have pity on me, monsieur. If you do really feel the slightest interest in me, read the letter to me,— in heaven’s name, read it! Let me at least know the extent of my misfortune; besides, there may be a line, or at least a word, of consolation.”

“ Well, my poor child, as you insist,” said the old man, adjusting the fragments of the letter, while Mariette watched him with despairing eyes, “ listen to the letter.”

And he read as follows :

“ ‘ MY DEAR MARIETTE : — I write you a few lines in great haste. My soul is full of despair, for we shall be obliged to renounce our hopes. My father’s comfort and peace of mind, in his declining years, must be assured at any cost. You know how devotedly I love my father. I have given my word, and you and I must never meet again.

“ ‘ One last request. I appeal both to your delicacy and generosity of heart. Make no attempt to induce me to change this resolution. I have been obliged to choose between my father and you; perhaps if I should see you again, I might not have the courage to do my duty as a son. My father’s future is, consequently, in your hands. I rely upon your generosity. Farewell! Grief over-

A SHAMEFUL DECEPTION.

powers me so completely that I can no longer hold my pen.

“Once more, and for ever, farewell.

“LOUIS.”

While this note was being read, Mariette might have served as a model for a statue of grief. Standing motionless beside the scrivener’s desk, with inertly hanging arms, and clasped hands, her downcast eyes swimming with tears, and her lips agitated by a convulsive trembling, the poor creature still seemed to be listening, long after the old man had concluded his reading.

He was the first to break the long silence that ensued.

“I felt certain that this letter would pain you terribly, my dear child,” he said, compassionately.

But Mariette made no reply.

“Do not tremble so, my child,” continued the scrivener. “Sit down; and here, take a sip of water.”

But Mariette did not even hear him. With her teardimmed eyes still fixed upon vacancy, she murmured, with a heart-broken expression on her face:

“So it is all over! There is nothing left for me in the world. It was too blissful a dream. I am like my godmother, happiness is not for such as me.”

“My child,” pleaded the old man, touched, in spite of himself, by her despair, “my child, don’t give way so, I beg of you.”

The words seemed to recall the girl to herself. She wiped her eyes, then, gathering up the pieces of the torn letter, she said, in a voice she did her best to steady:

“Thank you, monsieur.”

“What are you doing?” asked Father Richard, anxiously. “What is the use of preserving these fragments of a letter which will awaken such sad memories?”

“The grave of a person one has loved also awakens sad memories,” replied Mariette, with a bitter smile, “and yet one does not desert that grave.”

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After she had collected all the scraps of paper in the envelope, Mariette replaced it in her bosom, and, crossing her little shawl upon her breast, turned to go, saying, sadly: "I thank you for your kindness, monsieur;" then, as if bethinking herself, she added, timidly:

"Though this letter requires no reply, monsieur, after all the trouble I have given you, I feel that I ought to offer —"

"My charge is ten sous, exactly the same as for a letter," replied the old man, promptly, accepting and pocketing the remuneration with unmistakable eagerness, in spite of the conflicting emotions which had agitated him ever since the young girl's return. "And now *au revoir*, my child," he said, in a tone of evident relief; "our next meeting, I hope, will be under happier circumstances."

"Heaven grant it, monsieur," replied Mariette, as she walked slowly away, while Father Richard, evidently anxious to return home, closed the shutters of his stall, thus concluding his day's work much earlier than usual.

Mariette, a prey to the most despairing thoughts, walked on and on mechanically, wholly unconscious of the route she was following, until she reached the Pont au Change. At the sight of the river she started suddenly like one awaking from a dream, and murmured, "It was my evil genius that brought me here."

In another moment she was leaning over the parapet gazing down eagerly into the swift flowing waters below. Gradually, as her eyes followed the course of the current, a sort of vertigo seized her. Unconsciously, too, she was slowly yielding to the fascination such a scene often exerts, and, with her head supported on her hands, she leaned farther and farther over the stream.

"I could find forgetfulness there," the poor child said to herself. "The river is a sure refuge from misery, from hunger, from sickness, or from a miserable old age, an old age like that of my poor godmother.

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My godmother? Why, without me, what would become of her?"

Just then Mariette felt some one seize her by the arm, at the same time exclaiming, in a frightened tone:

"Take care, my child, take care, or you will fall in the river."

The girl turned her haggard eyes upon the speaker, and saw a stout woman with a kind and honest face, who continued, almost affectionately:

"You are very imprudent to lean so far over the parapet, my child. I expected to see you fall over every minute."

"I was not noticing, madame—"

"But you ought to notice, child. Good Heavens! how pale you are! Do you feel sick?"

"No, only a little weak, madame. It is nothing. I shall soon be all right again."

"Lean on me. You are just recovering from a fit of illness, I judge."

"Yes, madame," replied Mariette, passing her hand across her forehead. "Will you tell me where I am, please?"

"Between the Pont Neuf and the Pont au Change, my dear. You are a stranger in Paris, perhaps."

"No, madame, but I had an attack of dizziness just now. It is passing off, and I see where I am now."

"Wouldn't you like me to accompany you to your home, child?" asked the stout woman, kindly. "You are trembling like a leaf. Here, take my arm."

"I thank you, madame, but it is not necessary. I live only a short distance from here."

"Just as you say, child, but I'll do it with pleasure if you wish. No? Very well, good luck to you, then."

And the obliging woman continued on her way.

Mariette, thus restored to consciousness, as it were, realised the terrible misfortune that had befallen her all

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the more keenly, and to this consciousness was now added the fear of being cruelly reproached by her godmother just at a time when she was so sorely in need of consolation, or at least of the quiet and solitude that one craves after such a terrible shock.

Desiring to evade the bitter reproaches this long absence was almost sure to bring down upon her devoted head, and remembering the desire her godmother had expressed that morning, Mariette hoped to gain forgiveness by gratifying the invalid's whim, so, with the forty sous left of the amount she had obtained at the Mont de Piété still in her pocket, she hastened to a *rôtisseur's*, and purchased a quarter of a chicken there, thence to a bakery, where she bought a couple of crisp white rolls, after which she turned her steps homeward.

A handsome coupé was standing at the door of the house in which Mariette lived, though she did not even notice this fact, but when she stopped at the porter's room as usual, to ask for her key, Madame Justin exclaimed :

“ Your key, Mlle. Mariette ? Why, that gentleman called for it a moment ago.”

“ What gentleman ?”

“ A decorated gentleman. Yes, I should say he was decorated. Why, the ribbon in his buttonhole was at least two inches wide. I never saw a person with such a big decoration.”

“ But I am not acquainted with any decorated gentleman,” replied the young girl, much surprised. “ He must have made a mistake.”

“ Oh, no, child. He asked me if the Widow Lacombe didn't live here with her goddaughter, a seamstress, so you see there could be no mistake.”

“ But didn't you tell the gentleman that my godmother was an invalid and could not see any one ?”

“ Yes, child, but he said he must have a talk with her

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on a very important matter, all the same, so I gave him the key, and let him go up."

"I will go and see who it is, Madame Justin," responded Mariette.

Imagine her astonishment, when, on reaching the fifth floor, she saw the stranger through the half-open door, and heard him address these words to Madame Lacombe :

"As your goddaughter has gone out, my good woman, I can state my business with you very plainly."

When these words reached her ears, Mariette, yielding to a very natural feeling of curiosity, concluded to remain on the landing and listen to the conversation, instead of entering the room.

CHAPTER IV.

THE VOICE OF THE TEMPTER.

THE speaker was a man about forty-five years of age, with regular though rather haggard features and a long moustache, made as black and lustrous by some cosmetic as his artistically curled locks, which evidently owed their raven hue to artificial means. The stranger's physiognomy impressed one as being a peculiar combination of deceitfulness, cunning, and impertinence. He had large feet and remarkably large hands; in short, despite his very evident pretensions, it was easy to see that he was one of those vulgar persons who cannot imitate, but only parody real elegance. Dressed in execrable taste, with a broad red ribbon in the button-hole of his frock coat, he affected a military bearing. With his hat still on his head, he had seated himself a short distance from the bed, and as he talked with the invalid he gnawed the jewelled handle of a small cane that he carried.

Madame Lacombe was gazing at the stranger with mingled surprise and distrust. She was conscious, too, of a strong aversion, caused, doubtless, by his both insolent and patronising air.

“As your goddaughter is out, my good woman, I can state my business with you very plainly.”

These were the words that Mariette overheard on reaching the landing. The conversation that ensued was, in substance, as follows:

“ You asked, monsieur, if I were the Widow Lacombe,

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Mariette Moreau's godmother," said the sick woman tartly. "I told you that I was. Now, what do you want with me? Explain, if you please."

"In the first place, my good woman — "

"My name is Lacombe, Madame Lacombe."

"Oh, very well, Madame Lacombe," said the stranger, with an air of mock deference, "I will tell you first who I am; afterwards I will tell you what I want. I am Commandant de la Miraudière." Then, touching his red ribbon, he added, "An old soldier as you see — ten campaigns — five wounds."

"That is nothing to me."

"I have many influential acquaintances in Paris, dukes, counts, and marquises."

"What do I care about that?"

"I keep a carriage, and spend at least twenty thousand francs a year."

"While my goddaughter and I starve on twenty sous a day, when she can earn them," said the sick woman, bitterly. "That is the way of the world, however."

"But it is not fair, my good Mother Lacombe," responded Commandant de la Miraudière, "it is not fair, and I have come here to put an end to such injustice."

"If you've come here to mock me, I wish you'd take yourself off," retorted the sick woman, sullenly.

"Mock you, Mother Lacombe, mock you! Just hear what I have come to offer you. A comfortable room in a nice apartment, a servant to wait on you, two good meals a day, coffee every morning, and fifty francs a month for your snuff, if you take it, or for anything else you choose to fancy, if you don't, — well, what do you say to all this, Mother Lacombe ?"

"I say — I say you're only making sport of me, that is, unless there is something behind all this. When one offers such things to a poor old cripple like me, it is not for the love of God, that is certain."

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"No, Mother Lacombe, but for the love of two beautiful eyes, perhaps."

"Whose beautiful eyes?"

"Your goddaughter's, Mother Lacombe," replied Commandant de la Miraudière, cynically. "There is no use beating about the bush."

The invalid made a movement indicative of surprise, then, casting a searching look at the stranger, inquired:

"You know Mariette, then?"

"I have been to Madame Jourdan's several times to order linen, for I am very particular about my linen," added the stranger, glancing down complacently at his embroidered shirt-front. "I have consequently often seen your goddaughter there; I think her charming, adorable, and—"

"And you have come to buy her of me?"

"Bravo, Mother Lacombe! You are a clever and sensible woman, I see. You understand things in the twinkling of an eye. This is the proposition I have come to make to you: A nice suite of rooms, newly furnished for Mariette, with whom you are to live, five hundred francs a month to run the establishment, a maid and a cook who will also wait on you, a suitable outfit for Mariette, and a purse of fifty louis to start with, to say nothing of the other presents she will get if she behaves properly. So much for the substantials. As for the agreeable part, there will be drives in the park, boxes at the theatre,—I know any number of actors, and I am also on the best of terms with some very high-toned ladies who give many balls and card-parties,—in short, your goddaughter will have a delightful, an enchanted life, Mother Lacombe, the life of a duchess. Well, how does all this strike you?"

"Very favourably, of course," responded the sick woman, with a sardonic smile. "Such cattle as we are, are only fit to be sold when we are young, or to sell others when we are old."

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“ Ah, well, Mother Lacombe, to quiet your scruples, if you have any, you shall have sixty francs a month for your snuff, and I shall also make you a present of a handsome shawl, so you can go around respectably with Mariette, whom you are never to leave for a moment, understand, for I am as jealous as a tiger, and have no intention of being made a fool of.”

“ All this tallies exactly with what I said to Mariette only this morning. ‘ You are an honest girl,’ I said to her, ‘ and yet you can scarcely earn twenty sous a day making three hundred franc chemises for a kept woman.’ ”

“ Three hundred franc chemises ordered from Madame Jourdan’s ? Oh, yes, Mother Lacombe, I know. They are for Amandine, who is kept by the Marquis de Saint-Herem, an intimate friend of mine. It was I who induced her to patronise Madame Jourdan,—a regular bonanza for her, though the marquis is very poor pay, but he makes all his furnishers as well as all his mistresses the fashion. This little Amandine was a clerk in a little perfumery shop on the Rue Colbert six months ago, and Saint-Herem has made her the rage. There is no woman in Paris half as much talked about as Amandine. The same thing may happen to Mariette some day, Mother Lacombe. She may be wearing three hundred franc chemises instead of making them. Don’t it make you proud to think of it ? ”

“ Unless Mariette has the same fate as another poor girl I knew.”

“ What happened to her, Mother Lacombe ? ”

“ She was robbed.”

“ Robbed ? ”

“ She, too, was promised mountains of gold. The man who promised it placed her in furnished apartments, and at the end of three months left her without a penny. Then she killed herself in despair.”

“ Really, Mother Lacombe, what kind of a man do

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you take me for?" demanded the stranger, indignantly. "Do I look like a scoundrel, like a Robert Macaire?"

"I don't know, I am sure."

"I, an old soldier who have fought in twenty campaigns, and have ten wounds! I, who am hand and glove with all the lions of Paris! I, who keep my carriage and spend twenty thousand francs a year! Speak out, what security do you want? If you say so, the apartment shall be furnished within a week, the lease made out in your name, and the rent paid one year in advance; besides, you shall have the twenty-five or thirty louis I have about me to bind the bargain, if you like."

And as he spoke, he drew a handful of gold from his pocket and threw it on the little table by the sick woman's bed, adding: "You see I am not like you. I am not afraid of being robbed, Mother Lacombe."

On hearing the chink of coin, the invalid leaned forward, and cast a greedy, covetous look upon the glittering pile. Never in her life had she had a gold coin in her possession, and now she could not resist the temptation to touch the gleaming metal, and let it slip slowly through her fingers.

"I can at least say that I have handled gold once in my life," the sick woman murmured, hoarsely.

"It is nothing to handle it, Mother Lacombe. Think of the pleasure of spending it."

"There is enough here to keep one in comfort five or six months," said the old woman, carefully arranging the gold in little piles.

"And remember that you and Mariette can have as much every month if you like, Mother Lacombe, in good, shining gold, if you wish it."

After a long silence, the sick woman raised her hollow eyes to the stranger's face, and said:

"You think Mariette pretty, monsieur. You are right,

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and there is not a better-hearted, more deserving girl in the world. Well, be generous to her. This money is a mere trifle to a man as rich as you are. Make us a present of it."

"Eh?" exclaimed the stranger, in profound astonishment.

"Monsieur," said the consumptive, clasping her hands imploringly, "be generous, be charitable. This sum of money is a mere trifle to you, as I said before, but it would support us for months. We should be able to pay all we owe. Mariette would not be obliged to work night and day. She would have time to look around a little, and find employment that paid her better. We should owe five or six months of peace and happiness to your bounty. It costs us so little to live! Do this, kind sir, and we will for ever bless you, and for once in my life I shall have known what happiness is."

The sick woman's tone was so sincere, her request so artless, that the stranger, who could not conceive of any human creature being stupid enough really to expect such a thing of a man of his stamp, felt even more hurt than surprised, and said to himself :

"Really, this is not very flattering to me. The old hag must take me for a country greenhorn to make such a proposition as that."

So bursting into a hearty laugh, he said, aloud :

"You must take me for a philanthropist, or the winner of the Montyon prize, Mother Lacombe. I am to make you a present of six hundred francs, and accept your benediction and eternal gratitude in return, eh?"

The sick woman had yielded to one of those wild and sudden hopes that sometimes seize the most despondent persons; but irritated by the contempt with which her proposal had been received, she now retorted, with a sneer :

"I hope you will forgive me for having so grossly insulted you, I am sure, monsieur."

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"Oh, you needn't apologise, Mother Lacombe. I have taken no offence, as you see. But we may as well settle this little matter without any further delay. Am I to pocket those shining coins you seem to take so much pleasure in handling, yes or no?"

And he stretched out his hand as if to gather up the gold pieces.

With an almost unconscious movement, the sick woman pushed his hand away, exclaiming, sullenly:

"Wait a minute, can't you? You needn't be afraid that anybody is going to eat your gold."

"On the contrary, that is exactly what I would like you to do, on condition, of course —"

"But I know Mariette, and she would never consent," replied the sick woman, with her eyes still fixed longingly upon the shining coins.

"Nonsense!"

"But she is an honest girl, I tell you. She might listen to a man she loved, as so many girls do, but to you, never. She would absolutely refuse. She has her ideas — oh, you needn't laugh."

"Oh, I know Mariette is a virtuous girl. Madame Jourdan, for whom your goddaughter has worked for years, has assured me of that fact; but I know, too, that you have a great deal of influence over her. She is dreadfully afraid of you, Madame Jourdan says, so I am sure that you can, if you choose, persuade or, if need be, compel Mariette to accept — what? Simply an unlooked-for piece of good fortune, for you are housed like beggars and almost starving, that is evident. Suppose you refuse, what will be the result? The girl, with all her fine disinterestedness, will be fooled sooner or later by some scamp in her own station in life, and —"

"That is possible, but she will not have sold herself."

"That is all bosh, as you'll discover some day when her lover deserts her, and she has to do what so many other girls do to save herself from starving."

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"That is very possible," groaned the sick woman. "Hunger is an evil counsellor, I know, when one has one's child as well as one's self to think of. And with this gold, how many of these poor girls might be saved ! Ah ! if Mariette is to end her days like them, after all, what is the use of struggling ?"

For a minute or two the poor woman's contracted features showed that a terrible conflict was raging in her breast. The gold seemed to exercise an almost irresistible fascination over her ; she seemed unable to remove her eyes from it ; but at last with a desperate effort she closed them, as if to shut out the sight of the money, and throwing herself back on her pillow, cried, angrily :

"Go away, go away, and let me alone."

"What ! you refuse my offer, Mother Lacombe ?"

"Yes."

"Positively ?"

"Yes."

"Then I've got to pocket all this gold again, I suppose," said the stranger, gathering up the coins, and making them jingle loudly as he did so. "All these shining yellow boys must go back into my pocket."

"May the devil take you and your gold !" exclaimed the now thoroughly exasperated woman. "Keep your money, but clear out. I didn't take Mariette in to ruin her, or advise her to ruin herself. Rather than eat bread earned in such way, I would light a brazier of charcoal and end both the girl's life and my own."

Madame Lacombe had scarcely uttered these words before Mariette burst into the room, pale and indignant, and throwing herself upon the sick woman's neck, exclaimed :

"Ah, godmother. I knew very well that you loved me as if I were your own child !"

Then turning to Commandant de la Miraudière, whom she recognised as the man who had stared at her so persistently at Madame Jourdan's, she said contemptuously :

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“I beg that you will leave at once.”

“But, my dear little dove —”

“I was there at the door, monsieur, and I heard all.”

“So much the better. You know what I am willing to do, and I assure you —”

“Once more, I must request you to leave at once.”

“Very well, very well, my little Lucrece, I will go, but I shall allow you one week for reflection,” said the stranger, preparing to leave the room.

But on the threshold he paused and added :

“You will not forget my name, Commandant de la Miraudière, my dear. Madame Jourdan knows my address.”

After which he disappeared.

“Ah, godmother,” exclaimed the girl, returning to the invalid, and embracing her effusively, “how nobly you defended me !”

“Yes,” responded the sick woman, curtly, freeing herself almost roughly from her goddaughter’s embrace, “and yet with all these virtues, one perishes of hunger.”

“But, godmother —”

“Don’t talk any more about it, for heaven’s sake !” cried the invalid, angrily. “It is all settled. What is the use of discussing it any further ? I have done my duty ; you have done yours. I am an honest woman ; you are an honest girl. Great good it will do you, and me, too ; you may rest assured of that.”

“But, godmother, listen to me —”

“We shall be found here some fine morning stiff and cold, you and I, with a pan of charcoal between us. Ah, ha, ha !”

And with a shrill, mirthless laugh, the poor creature, embittered by years of misfortune, and chafing against the scruples that had kept her honest in spite of herself, put an end to the conversation by abruptly turning her back upon her goddaughter.

It was nearly night now.

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Mariette went out into the hall where she had left the basket containing the sick woman's supper. She placed the food on a small table near the bed, and then went and seated herself silently by the narrow window, where, drawing the fragments of her lover's letter from her pocket, she gazed at them with despair in her soul.

On leaving Mariette, the commandant said to himself : "I'm pretty sure that last shot told in spite of what they said. The girl will change her mind and so will the old woman. The sight of my gold seemed to dazzle the eyes of that old hag as much as if she had been trying to gaze at the noonday sun. Their poverty will prove a much more eloquent advocate for me than any words of mine. I do not despair, by any means. Two months of good living will make Mariette one of the prettiest girls in Paris, and she will do me great credit at very little expense. But now I must turn my attention to business. A fine little discovery it is that I have just made, and I think I shall be able to turn it to very good account."

Stepping into his carriage, he was driven to the Rue Grenelle St. Honoré. Alighting in front of No. 17, a very unpretentious dwelling, he said to the porter :

"Does M. Richard live here ?"

"A father and son of that name both live here, monsieur."

"I wish to see the son. Is M. Louis Richard in ?"

"Yes, monsieur. He has only just returned from a journey. He is with his father now."

"Ah, he is with his father ? Well, I would like to see him alone."

"As they both occupy the same room, there will be some difficulty about that."

The commandant reflected a moment, then, taking a visiting card bearing his address from his pocket, he added these words in pencil : "requests the honour of a

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visit from M. Louis Richard to-morrow morning between nine and ten, as he has a very important communication which will brook no delay, to make to him."

"Here are forty sous for you, my friend," said M. de la Miraudière to the porter, "and I want you to give this card to M. Louis Richard."

"That is a very easy way to earn forty sous."

"But you are not to give the card to him until to-morrow morning as he goes out, and his father is not to know anything about it. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly, monsieur, and there will be no difficulty about it as M. Louis goes out every morning at seven o'clock, while his father never leaves before nine."

"I can rely upon you, then?"

"Oh, yes, monsieur, you can regard the errand as done."

Commandant de la Miraudière reentered his carriage and drove away.

Soon after his departure a postman brought a letter for Louis Richard. It was the letter written that same morning in Mariette's presence by the scrivener, who had addressed it to No. 17 Rue de Grenelle, Paris, instead of to Dreux as the young girl had requested.

We will now usher the reader into the room occupied by the scrivener, Richard, and his son, who had just returned from Dreux.

CHAPTER V.

FATHER AND SON.

THE father and son occupied on the fifth floor of this old house a room that was almost identical in every respect with the abode of Mariette and her godmother. Both were characterised by the same bareness and lack of comfort. A small bed for the father, a mattress for the son, a rickety table, three or four chairs, a chest for their clothing — these were the only articles of furniture in the room.

Father Richard, on his way home, had purchased their evening repast, an appetising slice of ham and a loaf of fresh bread. These he had placed upon the table with a bottle of water, and a single candle, whose faint light barely served to render darkness visible.

Louis Richard, who was twenty-five years of age, had a frank, honest, kindly, intelligent face, while his shabby, threadbare clothing, worn white at the seams, only rendered his physical grace and vigour more noticeable.

The scrivener's features wore a joyful expression, slightly tempered, however, by the anxiety he now felt in relation to certain long cherished projects of his own.

The young man, after having deposited his shabby valise on the floor, tenderly embraced his father, to whom he was devoted ; and the happiness of being with him again and the certainty of seeing Mariette on the morrow made his face radiant, and increased his accustomed good humour.

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"So you had a pleasant journey, my son," remarked the old man, seating himself at the table.

"Very."

"Won't you have some supper? We can talk while we eat."

"Won't I have some supper, father? I should think I would. I did not dine at the inn like the other travellers, and for the best of reasons," added Louis, gaily, slapping his empty pocket.

"You have little cause to regret the fact, probably," replied the old man, dividing the slice of ham into two very unequal portions, and giving the larger to his son. "The dinners one gets at wayside inns are generally very expensive and very poor."

As he spoke, he handed Louis a thick slice of bread, and the father and son began to eat with great apparent zest, washing down their food with big draughts of cold water.

"Tell me about your journey, my son," remarked the old man.

"There is very little to tell, father. My employer gave me a number of documents to be submitted to M. Ramon. He read and studied them very carefully, I must say. At least he took plenty of time to do it,—five whole days, after which he returned the documents with numberless comments, annotations, and corrections."

"Then you did not enjoy yourself particularly at Dreux, I judge."

"I was bored to death, father."

"What kind of a man is this M. Ramon, that a stay at his house should be so wearisome?"

"The worst kind of a person conceivable, my dear father. In other words, an execrable old miser."

"Hum! hum!" coughed the old man, as if he had swallowed the wrong way. "So he is a miser, is he? He must be very rich, then."

"I don't know about that. One may be stingy with a

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small fortune as well as with a big one, I suppose ; but if this M. Ramon's wealth is to be measured by his parsimony, he must be a multi-millionaire. He is a regular old Harpagon."

" If you had been reared in luxury and abundance, I could understand the abuse you heap upon this old Harpagon, as you call him ; but we have always lived in such poverty that, however parsimonious M. Ramon may be, you certainly cannot be able to see much difference between his life and ours."

" Ah, father, you don't know what you're talking about."

" What do you mean ? "

" Well, M. Ramon keeps two servants ; we have none. He occupies an entire house ; we both eat and sleep in this garret room. He has three or four courses at dinner, we take a bite of anything that comes handy, but for all that we live a hundred times better than that skinflint does."

" But I don't understand, my son," said Father Richard, who for some reason or other seemed to be greatly annoyed at the derogatory opinion his son expressed. " There can be no comparison between that gentleman's circumstances and ours."

" My dear father, we make no attempt to conceal our poverty at all events. We endure our privations cheerfully, and if I sometimes, in my ambitious moments, dream of a rather more comfortable existence, you know it is not on my own account, for I am very well satisfied with my lot."

" My dear boy, I know what a kind heart you have, I know, too, how much you love me, and the only thing that consoles me for our poverty is the knowledge that you do not repine at your lot."

" Repine at my lot when you share it ? Besides, what we lack is really only the superfluous. We do not eat capons stuffed with truffles, it is true, but we eat with a

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good appetite,— witness the rapid disappearance of this big loaf of bread ; our clothes are threadbare, but warm ; we earn, both together, from seventeen to eighteen hundred francs a year. Not a colossal amount, by any means, but we owe no man a penny. Ah, my dear father, if Heaven never sends me any worse trouble than this, I shall never complain.”

“ You have no idea how much pleasure it gives me to see you accept your lot in life so cheerfully. But tell me, are you really happy ?”

“ Very happy.”

“ Really and truly ?”

“ Why should I wish to deceive you ? Do I ever look glum and sour like a man who is discontented with his lot ?”

“ That is only because you have such an uncommonly good disposition, perhaps.”

“ That depends. If I were obliged to live with that abominable old skinflint Ramon, I should soon become intolerable.”

“ Why are you so hard upon that poor man ?”

“ The recollection of the torture I endured under his roof, I suppose.”

“ Torture ?”

“ What else do you call it, father, to live in a big, cold, dilapidated, cheerless house,— a house so dreary, in fact, that the grave seems a cheerful abode in comparison ? And then to see those two thin, solemn-faced, famished-looking servants wandering about in that grim sepulchre ! And the meals,— meals at which the master of the house seems to count each morsel that you eat ! And his daughter,— for the man has a daughter who will perpetuate the breed, I suppose,— and his daughter, who doles out scanty portions for the domestics, and then carefully locks up the remains of the meagre meal !”

“ Louis, Louis, how is it that you, who are usually so

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charitably inclined, should be so strangely hostile to this poor man and his daughter?"

"His daughter! Can you call such a thing as that a daughter, a big, raw-boned creature, with feet and hands like a man's, a face like a nutcracker, and a nose,—great Heavens! what a nose,—a nose as long as that, and of a brick-red colour? But justice compels me to say that this incomparable creature has yellow hair and black teeth to make up for her red nose."

"The portrait is not flattered, evidently, but all women cannot be pretty, and a kind heart is much better than a pretty face."

"True, father, but how strange it is that there should be such remarkable contrasts in some families."

"What do you mean?"

"Judge of my surprise on seeing in one of the apartments of that gloomy house the portrait of a woman with such a charming, refined, distinguished face that it seemed as if the picture must have been placed there expressly to spite hateful Miss Red Nose. You shake your head, father, but I am sure you ought not to censure me very severely. At first I felt very sorry for the young lady when I saw her so excessively ugly, and, above all, condemned to live with such an old skinflint of a father; but afterwards, when I saw her nearly badger the life out of those two poor servants, scolding them continually for the merest trifle, and doling out the very smallest amount of food that would suffice to keep them alive, my compassion changed to aversion and positive loathing. But to return to the subject of the picture. The portrait bore such a striking resemblance to one of my old schoolmates that I asked old Harpagon who the lady was, and greatly to my surprise he told me that it was a portrait of his sister, the late Madame de Saint-Herem. 'Then this lady is, doubtless, the mother of the young Marquis de Saint-Herem?' I asked, and if you could only have seen old Ramon's face! One would

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have supposed I had just evoked the very devil himself. Miss Red Nose, too, made a gesture of pious horror (I forgot to tell you, to complete the picture, that she is one of the worst of bigots), whereupon her worthy parent answered that he had the misfortune to be the uncle of an infernal scoundrel named Saint-Herem."

"This M. de Saint-Herem must bear a very bad reputation, I judge."

"What! Florestan? the bravest and most delightful fellow in the world."

"But his uncle—"

"Listen, father, and you shall judge for yourself. Saint-Herem and I were very intimate at college, but I had lost sight of him for a long time, when about six months ago, as I was walking along the boulevard, I saw everybody turning to look at a beautiful mail phaeton drawn by two magnificent horses, and with two tiny footmen perched up behind. And who do you suppose was driving this exquisite turnout? My old college friend, Saint-Herem, who looked handsomer than ever; in fact, it would be impossible to conceive of a more distinguished-looking young man."

"I should judge that he must be a terrible spendthrift, though."

"Wait until you hear the end of my story, my dear father. The vehicle stopped suddenly, the little grooms jumped down and ran to the horses' heads. Saint-Herem sprang out of the phaeton, rushed up to me, and positively embraced me in his delight at meeting me again after such a long separation. I was dressed like the poor devil of a notary's clerk that I am, and you must admit, my dear father, that most men of fashion would have shrunk from even recognising such a plebeian-looking creature, but Florestan did not even seem to notice my plain apparel. As for me, I was both pleased and embarrassed by this manifestation of friendly feeling on his part, for we seemed to attract a great deal

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of attention. Saint-Herem, too, must have noticed the fact, for he exclaimed :

“ ‘ Did you ever see such a set of gaping idiots ? Where are you going ? ’

“ ‘ To the office.’

“ ‘ Then get in with me. We can talk as we drive along.’

“ ‘ What ! get into that stylish carriage with my clumsy shoes and big umbrella ? What will people think ? ’ I replied. But Florestan only shrugged his shoulders, and, seizing me by the arm, half led, half dragged me to the carriage. On our way to the office he made me promise that I would come and see him, and finally he set me down at the notary’s door with the warmest protestations of friendship and good-will. Now what do you think of a man who would act like that, father ? ’

“ Pooh ! ” responded the scrivener, with a by no means enthusiastic air, “ he yielded to a kindly impulse, that is all. I always distrust people who are so inclined to make a display of their friendship ; besides, you are in no position to keep up such an acquaintance.”

“ I know that ; still, under the circumstances, I felt obliged to keep my promise to take breakfast with Florestan on the following Sunday. The kind-hearted fellow treated me as if I were a prince, and begged me to come again, but I left for Dreux soon afterward, so I have not seen him since.”

“ It is very strange that you never said anything to me about your visit to him.”

“ Shall I tell you why I did not ? I said to myself : ‘ My poor father loves me so much he may fear that the sight of Florestan’s splendour will excite my envy, and make me dissatisfied with my own humble condition in life, so I will conceal the fact that I once breakfasted with a Sardanapalus or a Lucullus.’ ”

“ My dear, brave boy ! ” exclaimed the old man, with deep emotion, “ I understand ; and the delicacy of your

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conduct touches me deeply. It is only one more proof of your kindness and generosity of heart, but I beg that you will now listen to me attentively for a moment, for it is to this very generosity of feeling, as well as to your affection for me, that I am about to appeal. There is an extremely grave and important matter about which I must speak to you."

The scrivener's expression had become so serious and even solemn that the young man gazed at him with surprise; but just then the porter knocked at the door and said :

"Here is a letter for you, M. Louis."

"Very well," replied the young man, abstractedly, too much engaged in wondering what the important matter to which his father had alluded could be to pay much attention to the letter, which Father Richard instantly recognised as the one which he had written to his son that morning, and which he had addressed to the Rue de Grenelle instead of to Dreux, as poor Mariette had requested.

Knowing the contents of the missive, the old scrivener was on the point of advising his son to read the letter immediately, but, after a moment's reflection, he adopted the opposite course, and said :

"My dear boy, you will have plenty of time to read your letter by and by. Listen to me now, for I repeat there is a matter of great importance both to you and to me, that I must consult you about."

"I am at your service, my dear father," replied Louis, laying the letter which he had been about to open on the table.

CHAPTER VI.

A FATHER'S AMBITION.

FATHER RICHARD remained silent for a moment, then, turning to his son, said :

"I have warned you that I am about to appeal to your generosity as well as to your affection for me."

"Then you have only to speak, father."

"You told me just now that, if you sometimes dreamed of a less humble existence than ours, it was not on your own account, but mine."

"And that is perfectly true."

"Ah, well, my son, it only depends upon yourself to see this desire realised."

"What do you mean?"

"Listen to me. Reverses of fortune which closely followed your mother's death, while you were but an infant, left me barely property enough to defray the expenses of your education."

"Yes, my dear father, and the courage and resignation with which you have endured this misfortune have only increased my love and respect for you."

"Our pecuniary condition seems likely to speedily become worse instead of better, I regret to say. With old age fast coming on, and my failing vision, I realise that the day is near at hand when it will be impossible for me to earn even the pittance needed for my support."

"But, father, you may be sure —"

"Of your willing aid, I know that; but your own future is precarious in the extreme. The most you can

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hope for is to become chief clerk in a notary's office, for it takes money to study a profession, and I am poor."

"Do not worry, father. I shall always be able to earn money enough for us two."

"But what if sickness should come, or some accident should befall either of us, or you should be thrown out of employment for several months, what would become of us then?"

"My dear father, if we poor people stopped to think of the misfortunes that might befall us, we should lose courage. Let us close our eyes to the future, and think only of the present. That, thank Heaven! is not alarming."

"Yes, I admit that it is better not to think of the future when it is alarming, but when it may be happy and prosperous, if we choose to make it so, is it not well to open our eyes instead of closing them?"

"Certainly."

"So I repeat, that it depends entirely upon yourself to make our future both happy and prosperous."

"You may consider it done, then. Only tell me how I am to do it."

"I shall surprise you very much, I am sure, when I tell you that this M. Ramon with whom you have just spent several days, and whom you so cruelly misjudge, is an old friend of mine, and that the visit you just paid him was planned by him and me."

"But the papers my employer — "

"Your employer kindly consented to assist us by charging you with a pretended mission to Ramon."

"But why was it considered necessary to resort to this trick?"

"Ramon wished to see you and study you; in other words, to become thoroughly acquainted with you without your suspecting it, and I feel it my duty to tell you that he is delighted with you. I received a long letter

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from him this very morning, in which he speaks of you in the highest terms."

"I regret that I am unable to return the compliment; but how can M. Ramon's good or bad opinion affect me?"

"It does affect you very seriously, though, my dear boy, for the prosperous future of which I spoke is entirely dependent upon the opinion Ramon has of you."

"You speak in enigmas, father."

"Ramon, without being what is called rich, possesses a comfortable fortune, which, by reason of his wise economy, is increasing every day."

"I can readily believe that, only what you call economy is contemptible stinginess, father."

"Don't let us haggle about terms, my son. Call it parsimony or economy, or what you will, in consequence of it Ramon is sure to leave his daughter a handsome fortune, though he will give her nothing during his lifetime."

"That does not surprise me in the least; but I really cannot imagine what you are driving at, father?"

"I rather hesitate to tell you, because, however erroneous first impressions may be, they are very tenacious, and you have expressed yourself so harshly in relation to Mlle. Ramon —"

"Miss Red Nose? On the contrary, I assure you that I have been extremely lenient."

"Oh, you will get over your prejudice, I am sure. Believe me, Mlle. Ramon is one of those persons who have to be known to be appreciated. She is a young woman of remarkable strength of character as well as of the most exemplary piety. What more can one ask in the mother of a family?"

"The mother of a family?" repeated Louis, who, though he was far from suspecting the danger that menaced him, began to be conscious of a vague uneasiness. "And what difference does it make to me whether

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Mlle. Ramon proves an admirable mother of a family or not?"

"It is a matter of vital importance to you."

"To me?"

"Yes."

"And why?" demanded Louis, anxiously.

"Because it is the one desire of my life to see you Mlle. Ramon's husband," answered the old man, firmly.

"Mlle. Ramon's husband!" cried Louis, springing up with a movement of positive horror; "I marry that woman?"

"Yes, my son. Marry Mlle. Ramon, and our future is assured. We will go to Dreux to live. The house is large enough for us all. Ramon will give his daughter no dowry, but we are to live with him, that is decided, and he will procure you a lucrative situation. When your father-in-law dies, you will come into a handsome fortune. Louis, my son, my beloved son," added the old man, imploringly, seizing his son's hands, "consent to this marriage, I beg of you. Consent to it, and you will make me the happiest of men."

"Ah, father, you do not know what you are asking," replied Louis.

"You are going to say that you do not love Mlle. Ramon, perhaps; but mutual respect and esteem are sufficient, and you can give both to Mlle. Ramon, for she deserves them. As for her father, the parsimony that shocked you so much at first, will seem less objectionable when you recollect that, after all, you are the person who will profit by it, eventually. Ramon is really a most estimable man. The one ambition of his life is to leave his daughter and the husband of her choice a handsome fortune; to attain this end, he keeps his expenses down as much as possible. Is this any crime, I should like to know? Come, Louis, my dear boy, answer me, give me a word of hope."

"Father, much as it costs me to thwart your plans,

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what you ask is impossible," replied the young man, sadly.

" Louis, can it be you that answers me in this way when I appeal to your love for me ?"

" In the first place, you would derive no personal advantage from this marriage. You are thinking only of my interest when you urge it upon me."

" What ! is it nothing to be able to live with Ramon without being obliged to spend a sou ? For it is understood that we are to live there for nothing, I tell you, as he gives his daughter no dowry."

" So long as I have a drop of blood in my veins, I will accept charity from no man, father. More than once already I have begged you to abandon your profession of scrivener, and let me supply our modest wants without any assistance from you. I can easily do it by working a little harder."

" But if your health should fail, and old age should prevent me from earning a livelihood, there would be nothing left for me but to go to the almshouse."

" I have faith in my courage. I shall not lose my health, and you will want for nothing ; but, if I had to marry Mlle. Ramon, I should certainly die of grief and despair."

" You are not in earnest, Louis ?"

" I certainly am, father. I feel, and I always shall feel, an unconquerable aversion to Mlle. Ramon ; besides, I love a young girl, and she, and she alone, shall be my wife."

" I fancied I had your confidence, and yet you have come to such an important decision as this without my even suspecting it."

" I have been silent on the subject, because I wished to give convincing proofs of the permanent nature of this attachment before I confided my intentions to you. I, and the young girl I love, accordingly agreed to wait one year in order to see if our natures were really con-

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genial, and if what we considered real love were only an ephemeral fancy. Our love has withstood every test, thank God! The year expires to-day, and I shall see the girl I love to-morrow, in order to decide upon the day that she will broach the subject to her godmother who reared her. Forgive me, father," added Louis, interrupting the old man as he was about to speak; "I wish to say one word more. The girl I love is poor, and works for her daily bread as I do, but she is the best and noblest creature I know. Never will you find a more devoted daughter. Her earnings and mine will suffice for our needs; she is accustomed to even greater privations than we are. I will toil with redoubled ardour and diligence, and, believe me, you shall have the rest you so much need. Any disagreement between you and me is intensely painful to me. This is the first time, I believe, that we have ever differed in opinion, so spare me the sorrow of again refusing to comply with your request, I beseech you. Do not insist further upon the subject of this marriage. I can never resign myself to it, never! Nor will I ever have any other woman for my wife than Mariette Moreau!"

Louis uttered these last words in such a firm, though respectful tone that the old man, not considering it advisable to insist further, replied, with a disappointed air:

"I cannot believe, Louis, that all the reasons I have urged in favour of this marriage will remain valueless in your eyes. I have more faith in your heart than you have in mine, and I feel sure that a little reflection on your part will lead you to reconsider your decision."

"You must not hope that, father."

"I will so far comply with your wishes as to insist no further at this time; I trust to reflection to bring you to a different frame of mind. I give you twenty-four hours to come to a final decision. I will promise not to say another word to you on the subject until that time

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expires ; and I must request you, in turn, to make no further allusion to your wishes. Day after to-morrow we will talk the matter over again."

"So be it, father, but I assure you that at the expiration of —"

"We have agreed not to discuss the matter further at this time," interrupted the old man, beginning to walk the room in silence, with an occasional furtive glance at Louis, who, with his head supported on his hands, still remained seated at the table on which he had placed the letter a short time before.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FORGED LETTER.

HIS eyes having at last chanced to fall upon this letter addressed to him in a handwriting he did not recognise, Louis broke the seal mechanically.

A moment afterward, the old man, who was still silently pacing the floor, saw his son suddenly turn pale and pass his hand across his forehead as if to satisfy himself that he was not the victim of an optical delusion, then re-read with increasing agitation a missive which he seemed unable to credit.

This letter, which Father Richard had written in a disguised hand that morning, ostensibly from Mariette's dictation, far from expressing that young girl's real sentiments, read as follows :

"M. LOUIS : — I take advantage of your absence to write you what I should not dare to tell you, — what, in fact, I have put off confessing for more than two months for fear of causing you pain. All idea of a marriage between us must be abandoned, M. Louis, as well as all idea of ever seeing each other again.

"It is impossible for me to tell you the cause of this change in my feelings, but I assure you that my mind is fully made up. The reason I did not inform you yesterday, the sixth of May, M. Louis, the sixth of May, is that I wished to think the matter over once more, and in your absence, before telling you my decision.

"Farewell, M. Louis. Do not try to see me again. It

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would be useless and would only cause me great pain. If, on the contrary, you make no attempt to see me, or to induce me to reconsider my determination, my happiness as well as that of my poor godmother is assured.

“ It is consequently for the sake of the happiness and peace of mind of both of us, M. Louis, that I implore you not to insist upon another meeting.

“ You are so kind-hearted that I am sure you would not like to cause me unnecessary pain, for I solemnly swear that all is over between us. You will not insist further, I hope, when I tell you that I no longer love you except as a friend. MARIETTE MOREAU.

“ P. S. Instead of addressing this letter to Dreux, as you requested, I send it to your Paris address, in order that you may find it there on your return. Augustine, who has written for me heretofore, having gone home on a visit, I have had recourse to another person.

“ I forgot to say that my godmother’s health remains about the same.”

The perusal of this letter plunged Louis into a profound stupor. The ingenuous style of composition, the numerous petty details, the allusion, twice repeated, to the sixth of May, all proved that the missive must have been dictated by Mariette, so, after vainly asking himself what could be the cause of this sudden rupture, anger, grief, and wounded pride, all struggled for the mastery in the young man’s heart, and he murmured :

“ She need not insist so strongly upon my making no attempt to see her again ! Why should I desire to do so ? ”

But grief soon overcame anger in the young man’s heart. He endeavoured to recall all the particulars of his last interview with Mariette, but no indication of the slightest alienation of affection presented itself to his mind. On the contrary, never had she seemed more



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loving and devoted,—never had she seemed so eager to unite her lot with his. And yet, unless appearances were deceiving him, Mariette, whom he had always believed so pure and honest, was a monster of dissimulation.

Louis could not believe that; so, impatient to solve the mystery, and unable to endure this suspense any longer, he resolved to go to Mariette's home at once, even at the risk of offending her godmother, who, like Father Richard, had had no suspicion of the young people's mutual love up to the present time.

Not one of the different emotions which had in turn agitated the young man had escaped the scrivener's watchful eye, as, thinking it quite time to interfere, he said :

"Louis, we must leave for Dreux early to-morrow morning, for, if we do not, Ramon is sure to be here day after to-morrow, as has been agreed upon."

"Father!"

"Such a proceeding on our part does not compromise us in the least, and if you are determined to oppose the dearest wish of my heart, I only ask that you will spend a few more days with Ramon and his daughter, as a favour to me. After that, you will be perfectly free to act as you see fit."

Then seeing Louis pick up his hat, as if he intended to go out, Father Richard exclaimed :

"What are you doing? Where are you going?"

"I have a slight headache, father, and I am going out for awhile."

"Don't, I beg of you," exclaimed the old man, with growing alarm. "You have looked and acted very strangely ever since you read that letter. You frighten me."

"You are mistaken, father. There is nothing the matter with me. I have a slight headache, that is all. I shall be back soon."

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And Louis left the room abruptly.

As he passed the porter's lodge, that functionary stopped him, and said, with a mysterious air:

"M. Louis, I want to see you alone for a moment. Step inside, if you please."

"What is it?" asked Louis, as he complied with the request.

"Here is a card that a gentleman left for you. He came in a magnificent carriage, and said that his business was very important."

Louis took the card, and, approaching the lamp, read :

" *Commandant de la Miraudiere,*
17 *Rue du Mont-Blanc.*

"Requests the honour of a visit from M. Louis Richard to-morrow morning between nine and ten, as he has a very important communication, which will brook no delay, to make to him."

"Commandant de la Miraudière? I never heard the name before," Louis said to himself, as he examined the card, then, turning it over mechanically, he saw, written in pencil on the other side:

"Mariette Moreau, with Madame Lacombe, Rue des Prêtres St. Germain l'Auxerrois."

For M. de la Miraudière, having jotted down Mariette's address on one of his visiting cards, had, without thinking, written upon the same card the request for an interview which he had left for Louis.

That young man, more and more perplexed, endeavoured in vain to discover what possible connection there could be between Mariette and the stranger who had left the card. After a moment's silence, he said to the porter :

"Did the gentleman leave any other message?"

"He told me to give you the card when your father was not present."

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"That is strange," thought the young man.

"What kind of a looking man was he — young or old?" he asked, aloud.

"A very handsome man, M. Louis, a decorated gentleman, with a moustache as black as ink, and very elegantly dressed."

Louis went out with his brain in a whirl. This new revelation increased his anxiety. The most absurd suspicions and fears immediately assailed him, and he forthwith began to ask himself if this stranger were not a rival.

In her letter Mariette had implored Louis to make no attempt to see her again. Such a step on his part, would, she said, endanger not only her own happiness, but that of her godmother as well. Louis knew the trying position in which the two women were placed, and a terrible suspicion occurred to him. Perhaps Mariette, impelled as much by poverty as by her godmother's persistent entreaties, had listened to the proposals of the man whose card he, Louis, had just received. In that case, what could be the man's object in requesting an interview? Louis racked his brain in the hope of solving this mystery, but in vain.

These suspicions once aroused, the supposition that he had been betrayed for the sake of a rich rival seemed the only possible explanation of Mariette's strange conduct. Under these circumstances he abandoned his intention of going to Mariette's house for the present, or at least until after his interview with the commandant, from whom he was resolved to extort an explanation.

He returned home about midnight, and his father, convinced by the gloomy expression of his son's countenance that he could not have seen the girl and discovered the deception that had been practised upon both of them, again proposed that they should leave for Dreux the next morning, but Louis replied that he desired more time for reflection before taking this

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important step, and threw himself despairingly on his pallet.

Sleep was an impossibility, and at daybreak he stole out of the room to escape his father's questions, and after having waited in mortal anxiety on the boulevard for the hour appointed for his interview with Commandant de la Miraudière, he hastened to that gentleman's house.

CHAPTER VIII.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

WHEN Louis presented himself at the house of Commandant de la Miraudière, that gentleman was sitting at his desk, enveloped in a superb dressing-gown, smoking his cigar, and examining a big pile of notes and bills.

While he was thus engaged, his servant entered, and announced :

“ M. Richard.”

“ Ask M. Richard to wait in the drawing-room a moment. When I ring, show him in.”

As soon as the servant left the room, M. de la Miraudière opened a secret drawer in his desk, and took out twenty-five one thousand franc notes, and placed them beside a sheet of the stamped paper used for legal documents of divers kinds, then rang the bell.

Louis entered, with a gloomy and perturbed air. His heart throbbed violently at the thought that he was, perhaps, in the presence of a favoured rival, for this poor fellow, like sincere lovers in general, greatly exaggerated the advantages which his competitor possessed, so M. de la Miraudière, wrapped in a handsome dressing-gown, and occupying an elegant suite of apartments, seemed a very formidable rival indeed.

“ Is it to M. Louis Richard that I have the honour of speaking ? ” inquired M. de la Miraudière, with his most ingratiating smile.

“ Yes, monsieur.”

“ The only son of M. Richard, the scrivener ? ”

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These last words were uttered with a rather sarcastic air. Louis noted the fact, and responded, dryly:

“Yes, monsieur, my father is a scrivener.”

“Excuse me, my dear sir, for having given you so much trouble, but it was absolutely necessary that I should talk with you alone, and as that seemed well-nigh impossible at your own home, I was obliged to ask you to take the trouble to call here.”

“May I ask why you wished to see me, monsieur?”

“Merely to offer you my services, my dear M. Richard,” replied M. de la Miraudière in an insinuating tone. “For it would give me great pleasure to be able to call you my client.”

“Your client? Why, who are you, monsieur?”

“An old soldier, now on the retired list,—twenty campaigns, ten wounds,—now a man of affairs, merely to pass away the time. I have a number of large capitalists as backers, and I often act as an intermediary between them and young men of prospective wealth.”

“Then I do not know of any service you can render me.”

“You say that, when you are leading a life of drudgery as a notary’s clerk, when you are vegetating—positively vegetating—living in a miserable attic with your father, and dressed, Heaven knows how!”

“Monsieur!” exclaimed Louis, fairly purple with indignation.

“Excuse me, my young friend, but these are, I regret to say, the real facts of the case, shameful as they appear. Why, a young man like you ought to be spending twenty-five or thirty thousand francs a year, ought to have his horses and mistresses and enjoy life generally.”

“Monsieur, if this is intended as a joke, I warn you that I am in no mood for it,” said Louis, angrily.

“As I have already told you, I am an old soldier who has proved his valour on many a well-fought field, my young friend, so I can afford not to take offence at your

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manner, for which there is plenty of excuse, I must admit, as what I am saying must seem rather extraordinary to you."

"Very extraordinary, monsieur."

"Here is something that may serve to convince you that I am speaking seriously," added the man of affairs, spreading out the thousand franc notes on his desk. "Here are twenty-five thousand francs that I should be delighted to place at your disposal, together with twenty-five hundred francs a month for the next five years."

Louis, unable to believe his own ears, gazed at M. de la Miraudière in speechless astonishment, but at last, partially recovering from his stupor, he said:

"You make this offer to me, monsieur?"

"Yes, and with very great pleasure."

"To me, Louis Richard?"

"To you, Louis Richard."

"Richard is a very common name, monsieur. You probably mistake me for some other person."

"No, no, my young friend, I know what I am talking about, and I also know who I am talking to. It is to Louis Désiré Richard, only son of M. Alexandre Timoléon Bénédict Pamphile Richard, aged sixty-seven, born in Brie Comte Robert, but now residing at No. 17, Rue de Grenelle St. Honoré, a scrivener by profession. There is no mistake, you see, my young friend."

"Then as you know my family so well, you must also know that my poverty prevents me from contracting any such a loan."

"Your poverty!"

"Yes, monsieur."

"It is shameful, it is outrageous, to rear a young man under such a misapprehension of the real state of affairs," exclaimed the commandant, indignantly, "to compel him to spend the best years of his life in the stock, as it were, and to compel him to wear shabby clothes and woollen stockings and brogans. Fortunately, there is such

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a thing as Providence, and you now behold a humble instrument of Providence in the shape of Commandant de la Miraudière."

"I assure you that all this is extremely tiresome, monsieur. If you cannot explain more clearly, we had better bring this interview to an immediate conclusion."

"Very well, then. You believe your father to be a very poor man, do you not?"

"I am not ashamed of the fact."

"Oh, credulous youth that you are! Listen and bless me ever afterward."

As he spoke, M. de la Miraudière drew a large leather-bound book resembling a ledger toward him, and, after a moment's search, read aloud as follows:

"Inventory of Personal Property of M. Alexandre Timoléon Bénédict Pamphile Richard, from information secured by the Committee on Loans of the Bank of France, May 1, 18—.

"1st. Three thousand nine hundred and twenty shares of the Bank of France, market value,	924,300 fr.
"2d. Notes of the Mont de Piété,	875,250
"3d. On Deposit in the Bank of France,	259,130
"Total,	<u>2,058,680 fr.'</u>

"You see from these figures, my ingenuous young friend, that the known personal property of your honoured parent amounted, on the first of this month, to considerably over two million francs; but it is more than likely that, after the fashion of most misers who take a vast amount of pleasure in seeing and handling a part of their wealth, he has a large amount of money hoarded away in some convenient hiding-place. Even if this should not be the case, you see that the author of your being possesses more than two million francs, and as he spends barely twelve hundred francs out of an income of nearly one hundred thousand, you can form some idea of the

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amount of wealth you will enjoy some day, and you can no longer wonder at the offer I have just made you."

Louis was petrified with astonishment by this revelation. He could not utter a word, but merely gazed at the speaker with inexpressible amazement.

"You seem to be knocked all in a heap, my young friend. You act as if you were dazed."

"I really do not know what to think of all this," stammered Louis.

"Do as St. Thomas did, then. Touch these bank-notes and perhaps that will convince you. The capitalists who are backing me are not inclined to run any risk with their lucre, and they are willing to advance you this money at seven per cent., with a like commission for my services in addition. Interest and loan together will scarcely amount to one-half of your father's yearly income, so you will still be piling up money, even if you should live as a gentleman ought to live, and spend fifty thousand francs a year. It will be impossible for you to get along on less than that, but you can at least wait with patience for the hour of your honoured parent's demise, you understand. And, by the way, I have provided for every contingency, as you will see when I tell you about the little scheme I have invented, for of course your good father will be astonished at the change in your mode of living, so you are to invest in a lottery ticket — the prize, a magnificent five hundred louis diamond ; price of tickets, ten francs each. The drawing takes place day after to-morrow ; you will win the prize and sell it again for eight or nine thousand francs. This money you must allow a friend to invest for you in a wonderfully successful enterprise, which will yield three hundred per cent. a year. Thanks to this stratagem, you can spend twenty-five or thirty thousand francs a year under your father's very nose. Tell me, now, young man, haven't you good cause to regard me in the light of a guardian angel, or a beneficent Providence ? But

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what on earth is the matter with you? What is the meaning of this clouded brow, this solemn air, this gloomy silence, when I expected to see you half-delirious with joy, and fairly turning somersaults in your delight at being transformed from a clerk into a millionaire, in less than a quarter of an hour. Speak, young man, speak! Can it be that joy and astonishment have bereft him of reason?"

It is a fact that a revelation which would undoubtedly have filled any one else with the wildest joy had only aroused a feeling of painful resentment in Louis Richard's breast. The deception his father had practised upon him wounded him deeply, but bitterer still was the thought that, but for Mariette's cruel desertion, he might have shared this wealth with her some day, and changed the laborious, squalid life the young girl had always led into one of ease and luxury.

This reflection, reviving as it did such poignant regrets, dominated him so completely that, forgetting everything else, he drew out the visiting card the commandant had left for him, and demanded, abruptly:

"Will you tell me how it happens that Mlle. Moreau's name and address are written in pencil on the back of this card?"

"What!" exclaimed the commandant, amazed at the question, especially at such a moment. "You wish to know—"

"How it happens that Mlle. Moreau's address is on this card. When I ask a question, I expect to have it answered."

"The devil! My young friend, you are trying to carry things with a high hand, it strikes me."

"You are at perfect liberty to take offence at my manner, if you choose."

"Really, monsieur!" exclaimed the usurer, straightening himself up and twirling his black moustache quite ferociously. Then, with a sudden change of manner, he

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added: "Oh, nonsense! I have proved my valour beyond all question. An old soldier, with any number of wounds, I can afford to let many things pass; so I will merely say, my dear client, that that young girl's name and address happen to be on the card because I wrote them there so I would not forget them."

"You know Mlle. Mariette, then?"

"I do."

"You are paying court to her, perhaps?"

"Rather."

"With hopes of success?"

"Decidedly."

"Very well, I forbid you ever to set foot in her house again."

"Ah, ha! so I have a rival," the usurer said to himself. "How funny! I understand the girl's refusal now. I must get ahead of my client, though. He is young and unsophisticated,—that means he is jealous. He will be sure to fall into the trap, then I can oust him, for I've set my heart on the girl, and if I can't get her this young fellow sha'n't. I'm resolved upon that!"

After which, he added aloud:

"My dear friend, when I am forbidden to do anything, I consider it my bounden duty to do precisely what I am forbidden to do."

"We will see about that, monsieur."

"Listen, young man. I have fought fifty-seven duels, so I can easily dispense with fighting the fifty-eighth with you. I prefer, consequently, to try to induce you to listen to the voice of reason, if possible. Permit me, therefore, to ask you one question: You have just returned from a journey, I believe?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"You were absent several days, I think. May I ask if you have seen Mariette since your return?"

"No, monsieur, but—"

"Ah, well, my young friend, the same thing has hap-

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pened to you that has happened to many other lovers. Mariette was not aware that you were the son of a millionaire; I presented myself in your absence, and offered her what has never yet failed to turn the head of a half-starved grisette. Her godmother, who was also dying of hunger, craved the fleshpots of Egypt, naturally,—and, well, '*les absents ont toujours tort*,' you know. Ha, ha, you understand!"

"My God!" groaned Louis, his anger giving place to profound despair. "My God! it is true, then."

"If I had known that I was interfering with a prospective client, I would have abstained, I assure you. Now it is too late. Besides, there are as good fish in the sea— You know the proverb. Come, my young friend, don't take it so much to heart. The girl was entirely too young for you. She needs training. You will find plenty of charming women already trained and thoroughly trained. I can particularly recommend a certain Madame—"

"Wretch!" exclaimed Louis, seizing the man of affairs by the collar, "wretch!—"

"Monsieur, you shall answer for this!" exclaimed the commandant, trying to wrench himself from his rival's iron grasp.

Just then the door opened suddenly, and, at the sound of a loud laugh, both men turned simultaneously.

"Saint-Herem!" exclaimed Louis, recognising his old schoolmate.

"You here!" exclaimed Florestan de Saint-Herem, while the usurer, adjusting the collar of his dressing-gown, muttered savagely under his breath:

"What the devil brought Saint-Herem here just at this most inopportune moment, I should like to know!"

CHAPTER IX.

COMMANDANT DE LA MIRAUDIÈRE'S ANTECEDENTS.

M. DE SAINT-HEREM was a handsome man, not over thirty years of age, with a remarkably distinguished manner and bearing. His refined and rather spirituelle face sometimes wore an expression of extreme superciliousness, as when he addressed any remark to Commandant de la Miraudière, for instance; but at the sight of his old schoolmate he seemed to experience the liveliest joy. He even embraced him affectionately, and Louis returned the embrace heartily, spite of the conflicting emotions that agitated him.

But this manifestation of surprise and pleasure over, the chief actors in the scene relapsed into the same mood they had been in when Saint-Herem so unexpectedly burst in upon them, and Louis, pale with anger, continued to cast such wrathful glances at the usurer that M. de Saint-Herem said to that gentleman, with a mocking air:

"You must admit that I arrived very opportunely. But for my timely appearance upon the scene of action, it seems to me my friend Louis would soon have taken all the starch out of you."

"To dare to lay his hand on me, an old soldier!" exclaimed the commandant, advancing a step toward Louis. "This matter shall not be allowed to end here, M. Richard."

"That is for you to say, M. de la Miraudière."

"M. de la Miraudière? Ha, ha, ha!" roared Flores-

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tan. "What! my dear Louis, you really take that fellow seriously? You believe in his title, in his cross, in his campaigns, his wounds, his duels, and his high-sounding name?"

"Enough of this jesting," said the pretended commandant, colouring with vexation. "Even friendly raillery has its limits, my dear fellow."

"M. Jerome Porquin," began Florestan, then, turning to Louis, he added, pointing to the usurer, "his real name is Porquin, and a very appropriate name it is, it seems to me."

Then once more addressing the pretended commandant, Florestan added, in a tone that admitted of no reply:

"This is the second time I have been obliged to forbid your calling me your dear friend, M. Porquin. It is different with me, I have bought and paid for the right to call you my dear, my enormously, entirely too dear M. Porquin, for you have swindled me most outrageously—"

"Really, monsieur, I will not allow—"

"What is that? Since when has M. Porquin become so terribly sensitive?" cried Saint-Herem, with an affectation of intense astonishment. "What has happened? Oh, yes, I understand. It is your presence, my friend Louis, that makes this much too dear M. Porquin squirm so when I expose his falsehoods and his absurd pretensions. To settle this vexed question once for all, I must tell you—and let us see if he will have the effrontery to contradict me—who M. le Commandant de la Miraudière really is. He has never served his country except in the sutler's department. He went to Madrid in that capacity during the late war, and as he proved to be too great an expense to the government, he was asked to take himself off. He did so, and transformed himself into what he calls a man of affairs, or, in other words, into a usurer, and an intermediary in all

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sorts of shady transactions. The decoration he wears is that of the Golden Spur, a papal order, which one holy man procured from another holy man as a reward for his assistance in a most atrocious swindle. He has never fought a duel in his life, in the first place because he is one of the biggest cowards that ever lived, and in the second place because he bears such a bad reputation that he knows perfectly well that no respectable man would condescend to fight with him, and that if he becomes insolent the only thing to do is to give him a sound thrashing."

"When you want to make use of me you do not treat me in this fashion, monsieur," said the usurer, sullenly.

"When I need you, I pay you, M. Porquin, and as I know all your tricks, my too dear M. Porquin, I feel it my duty to warn my friend, M. Richard, against you. You are doubtless eager to devour him; in fact, it is more than likely that you have already begun to weave your toils around him, but —"

"That is the way some persons reward faithful service!" exclaimed M. Porquin, bitterly. "I reveal a secret of the highest importance to him, and —"

"I understand your motive now," responded Louis Richard, dryly, "so I owe you no gratitude for the service you have rendered me,—that is, if it be a service," he added, sadly.

The usurer had no intention of losing his prey, however, and, deeming it advisable to ignore the insults M. de Saint-Herem had heaped upon him, he said to Saint-Herem, with as much assurance as if that gentleman had not so roughly unmasked him:

"Your friend, M. Richard is at perfect liberty to tell you the conditions of the bargain I just proposed to him, and you can then judge whether my demands are exorbitant or not. As my presence might be a constraint, gentlemen, will you kindly step into the adjoining room? I will await M. Richard's decision here; that

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is, of course, if he desires to ask your advice on the subject."

"An admirable suggestion, truly, my too dear M. Porquin," responded Florestan, promptly. And, taking Louis by the arm, he led him toward the door, remarking to the usurer, as he did so :

"On my return, I will tell you the object of my visit, or rather, I will tell you now. I must have two hundred louis this evening. Here, examine these securities."

And M. de Saint-Herem, drawing some papers from his pocket, threw them to the usurer, then entered the adjoining room, accompanied by his friend.

The revelation of M. Porquin's real character was another terrible blow to Louis Richard. The knowledge that it was for the sake of such a wretch as this that Mariette had been false to him caused him bitter sorrow, and, unable to restrain his feelings, as soon as he found himself alone with his friend, he seized both Saint-Herem's hands, and, in a voice trembling with emotion, exclaimed :

"Oh, Florestan, how miserable I am!"

"I suspected as much, my dear Louis, for it must be worse than death for a sensible, industrious fellow like you to find yourself in the clutches of a scoundrel like Porquin. What is the trouble? Your habits have always been so frugal, how did you manage to get into debt? Tell me about it. What seems an enormous sum to you may be but a trifle to me. I just told that rascal in there that he was to let me have two hundred louis this evening, and I am sure he will. You shall share them with me, or you can have the whole amount if you want it. Two hundred louis will certainly pay all the debts any notary's clerk can have contracted. I do not say this to humiliate you, far from it. If you need more, we will try to get it elsewhere, but for God's sake don't apply to Porquin. If you do you are lost. I know the scoundrel so well."

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Saint-Herem's generous offer gave Louis such heartfelt pleasure that he almost forgot his sorrows for the moment.

"My dear, kind friend, if you knew how much this proof of your friendship consoles me," he exclaimed.

"So much the better. You accept my offer, then."

"No."

"What?"

"I do not need your kind services. This usurer, whom I had never heard of before, sent for me yesterday to offer to loan me, each year, more money than I have spent in my whole life."

"What! He makes you such an offer as that, this usurer who never loans so much as a sou without the very best security. Men of his stamp set a very small valuation on honesty, industry, and integrity, and I know that these are your sole patrimony, my dear Louis."

"You are mistaken, Florestan. My father is worth over two millions."

"Your father!" exclaimed Saint-Herem, in profound astonishment. "Your father?"

"Yes. In some mysterious way this usurer has managed to discover a secret, of which even I had not the slightest suspicion, I assure you, so he sent for me—"

"To offer you his services, of course. He and others of his ilk are always on the lookout for hidden fortunes, and when they find them they offer to the prospective heirs such advances as will enable them to squander their wealth before they inherit it. So you are rich, my dear Louis! You need not feel any doubts on the subject. If Porquin has made you such an offer, he knows it for a certainty."

"Yes, I think so, too," said Louis, almost sadly.

"Why do you speak so mournfully, Louis? One would suppose that you had just made some terrible discovery. What is the matter with you? What is the meaning of those tears I saw in your eyes a little while

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ago? And of that exclamation, 'I am very miserable!' You miserable, and why?"

"Do not ridicule me, my friend. The truth is, I love, and I have been deceived."

"You have a rival, then, I suppose."

"Yes, and, to crown my misfortunes, this rival —"

"Go on."

"Is this rascally usurer."

"Porquin, that old scoundrel! The girl prefers him to you? Impossible! But what leads you to suppose —"

"Several suspicious circumstances; besides, he says so."

"Fine authority that! He lies, I am certain of it."

"But, Florestan, he is rich, and the girl I loved, or rather whom I still love in spite of myself, is terribly poor."

"The devil!"

"Besides, she has an invalid connection to take care of. This scoundrel's offers must have dazzled the poor child, or want may have induced her to listen to the voice of the tempter, as so many others do. What does the discovery of this wealth profit me now? I care nothing for it if I cannot share it with Mariette."

"Listen, Louis, I know you, and I feel confident that you must have placed your affections wisely."

"Yes; and for more than a year Mariette has given every proof of her faithful attachment to me, but yesterday, without the slightest warning, came a letter breaking our engagement."

"A good girl who has loved a man as poor as you were faithfully for a year would not have been so quickly won over by the promises of an old villain like Porquin. He lied to you; I haven't a doubt of it."

Then calling out at the top of his voice, to the great surprise of Louis, he exclaimed:

"Commandant de la Miraudière, come here a minute!"

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“ What are you going to do, Florestan ? ” asked Louis, as the usurer appeared in the doorway.

“ Keep still and let me manage this affair,” replied his friend. Then, turning to the usurer, he continued :

“ M. de la Miraudière, I feel sure that you must be labouring under a misapprehension in relation to a very nice young girl who — according to your account — has fallen a victim to your charms. Will you do me the favour to tell me the truth so I may know what action to take in the matter ? ”

Concluding that it would be politic to sacrifice a caprice that he had little chance of gratifying to the advantage of having Louis Richard for a client, Porquin replied :

“ I must confess that I deeply deplore a stupid jest that seems to have annoyed M. Richard so much.”

“ I told you so,” remarked Florestan, turning to his friend. “ And now M. le commandant must do me the favour to explain how the idea of this stupid jest, or rather what I should call an atrocious calumny, happened to occur to him.”

“ The explanation is very simple, monsieur. I saw Mlle. Mariette several times in the establishment where she is employed. Her beauty struck me. I asked for her address, secured it, and, finding her godmother at home when I called, I proposed to her that — ”

“ Enough, monsieur, enough ! ” cried Louis, indignantly.

“ Permit me to add, however, that the aforesaid godmother declined my offer, and that the young lady, herself, chancing to come about that time, coolly ordered me out of the house. I am making a frank confession, you see, M. de Saint-Herem. I do it, I admit, in the hope that it will gain me M. Richard’s confidence, and that he will decide to accept my services. As for you, M. de Saint-Herem,” continued the usurer, in his most ingratiating manner, “ I have examined the securities you sub-

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mitted to me, and I will bring you the money you want this evening. And, by the way, when you hear the offer I have made to M. Richard, I feel confident that you will consider my terms very reasonable."

"I do not want your money, monsieur," said Louis, "and I consider it an insult for you to think me capable of trading upon my father's death, as it were —"

"But, my dear client, permit me to say —"

"Come, Florestan, let us go," Louis said to his friend, without paying the slightest attention to the usurer's protest.

"You see, my too dear M. Porquin," said Saint-Hercin, as he turned to depart, "you see there are still a few honest men and women left in the world. It is useless to hope that this discovery will serve either as an example or a lesson for you, however. You are too set in your ways ever to reform; but it is some comfort to know of your double defeat."

"Ah, my dear Florestan," remarked Louis, as they left the house, "thanks to you, I am much less miserable. The fact that Mariette treated this villain with the scorn he deserved is some comfort, even though she has decided to break her engagement with me."

"Did she tell you so?"

"No, she wrote me to that effect, or rather she got some other person to do it for her."

"What, she got some other person to write such a thing as that for her!"

"You will sneer, perhaps, but the poor girl I love can neither read nor write."

"How fortunate you are! You will at least escape such epistles as I have been receiving from a pretty little perfumer I took away from a rich but miserly old banker. I have been amusing myself by showing her a little of the world,—it is so pleasant to see people happy,—but I have not been able to improve her grammar, and such spelling! It is of the antediluvian type. Mother Eve

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must have written in much the same fashion. But if your Mariette can neither read nor write, how do you know but her secretary may have distorted the facts?"

"With what object?"

"I don't know, I am sure. But why don't you have an explanation with her? You will know exactly how you stand, then."

"But she implored me, both for the sake of her peace of mind and her future, to make no attempt to see her again."

"On the contrary, see her again, and at once, for the sake of her future, now you are a prospective millionaire."

"You are right, Florestan, I will see her, and at once; and if this cruel mystery can be satisfactorily explained, if I find her as loving and devoted as in the past, I shall be the happiest man in the world. Poor child, her life up to this time has been one of toil and privation. She shall know rest and comfort now, for I cannot doubt that my father will consent. My God!"

"What is the matter?"

"All this has made me entirely forget something that will surprise you very much. My father insists that I shall marry your cousin."

"What cousin?"

"Mlle. Ramon. A short time ago I went to Dreux; in fact, I have just returned from there. I had not the slightest suspicion of my father's plans, when I first saw the young lady, but, even if I had not been in love with Mariette, your uncle's daughter impressed me so unfavourably that nothing in the world —"

"So my uncle is not ruined, as he pretended he was several years ago," said Florestan, interrupting his friend. "No, evidently not, for if your father wishes you to marry my cousin, it is because he thinks such an alliance would be to your advantage. Doubtless my uncle's pretended failure was only a subterfuge."

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" My father resorted to the same expedient, I think, though he has always given me to understand that extreme poverty was the cause of the parsimonious manner in which we lived."

" Ah, Uncle Ramon, I knew that you were sulky, ill-tempered, and detestable generally, but I did not believe you capable of such cleverness of conception. From this day on I shall admire and revere you. I am not your heir, it is true, but it is always delightful to know that one has a millionaire uncle. It is such a comforting thought in one's financial difficulties ; one can indulge in all sorts of delightful hypotheses, in which apoplexy and even cholera present themselves to the mind in the guise of guardian angels."

" Without going quite as far as that, and without wishing for any one's death," said Louis, smiling, " I must admit that I would much rather see your uncle's fortune pass into your hands than into those of his odious daughter. You would at least enjoy the possession of it, and, with all that wealth, I feel sure that you would — "

" Contract debts without number," Saint-Herem interrupted, majestically.

" What, Florestan, with a fortune like that — "

" I should contract debts without number, I tell you. Yes, of course I should."

" What, with a fortune of two or three million francs ? "

" With ten, even twenty millions, I should still contract debts. My theory is that of the government,— the larger a country's debt, the better that country's credit is. But I will expound my financial theories some other time. Don't lose a moment now in hastening to Mariette, and be sure and tell me what success you meet with. Here it is nearly noon, and I promised the little perfumer — who amuses me immensely — that she should try a new saddle-horse to-day, the handsomest

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hack in Paris,— it cost me a nice price, by the way,— and she wrote me this morning to remind me that I had promised to take her to the Bois. So hasten to your Mariette. I feel confident that your love affair will end happily after all. But write to me, or else come and see me as soon as possible, for I shall be so anxious to hear the result of your interview."

" You shall hear from me, my dear Florestan, whatever happens."

" Farewell then, my dear Louis, it is agreed that I shall see or hear from you before to-morrow."

As he spoke, M. de Saint-Herem stepped into the handsomely appointed brougham which was waiting for him at the usurer's door, and Louis Richard wended his way on foot to Mariette's home.

CHAPTER X.

THE MYSTERY EXPLAINED.

WHEN Louis Richard entered the room occupied by Mariette and her godmother, he paused a moment on the threshold, overwhelmed with grief and despair at the affecting scene that presented itself to his gaze.

Mariette was lying to all appearance lifeless on a mattress on the floor. Her features, which were overspread with a death-like pallor, contracted convulsively from time to time. Her eyes were closed, and there were still traces of tears on her marble cheeks, while in one of the clenched hands crossed upon her breast was the envelope containing the fragments of the letter she had received from Louis.

Madame Lacombe's usually grim and sardonic face showed that she was a prey to the most poignant grief and distress. Kneeling beside the mattress on which her goddaughter was lying, she was supporting Mariette's head upon her mutilated arm, and holding a glass of water to the girl's inanimate lips with the other.

Hearing a sound, Madame Lacombe turned hastily, and her features resumed their usually hard and irascible expression, as she saw Louis standing motionless in the doorway.

“What do you want?” she demanded, brusquely.
“Why do you come in without knocking? I don't know you. Who are you?”

“My God! in what a terrible condition I find her!” exclaimed Louis.

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And without paying any attention to Madame Lacombe's question, he sprang forward, and, throwing himself on his knees beside the pallet, exclaimed, imploringly :

" What is the matter, Mariette ? Answer me, I beseech you."

Madame Lacombe, who had been as much surprised as annoyed at the young man's intrusion, now scrutinised his features closely, and, after a moment's reflection, said, sullenly :

" You are Louis Richard, I suppose ?"

" Yes, madame, but in Heaven's name what has happened to Mariette ?"

" You have killed her, that is all !"

" I ? Great God ! But, madame, something must be done. Let me run for a doctor. Her hands are like ice. Mariette, Mariette ! Oh, my God ! my God ! she does not hear me."

" She has been in this state ever since last night, and it was your letter that caused it."

" My letter ! What letter ?"

" Oh, you intend to deny it now, I suppose. You needn't, for last night the poor child couldn't bear it any longer, and told me all."

" Great Heavens ! What did she tell you ?"

" That you never wanted to lay eyes on her again, and that you had deserted her for another. That is always the way with you men !"

" On the contrary, I wrote to Mariette that — "

" You lie !" exclaimed the old woman, more and more incensed. " She told me what was in the letter. She has it here in her hand. I haven't been able to get it away from her. Hadn't she enough to bear without your treating her in this way ? Get out of this house, you scoundrel ! Mariette was a fool, and so was I, to refuse the offer made us, and I told her so at the time. ' See how we shall be rewarded for our honesty,' I said to

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her. And my words have come true. She is dying, and I shall be turned out into the street, for we are behind in our rent, and the little furniture we have will be taken from us. Fortunately, I have a quarter of a bushel of charcoal left," she added, with a grim smile, "and charcoal is the friend and deliverer of the poor."

"This is horrible!" cried Louis, unable to restrain his tears; "but I swear to you that we are all the victims of a most deplorable mistake. Mariette, Mariette, arouse yourself! It is I—I, Louis!"

"You are determined to kill her, I see!" exclaimed Madame Lacombe, making a desperate effort to push the young man away. "If she recovers consciousness, the sight of you will finish her!"

"Thank God!" exclaimed Louis, resisting Madame Lacombe's efforts, and again bending over Mariette; "she is moving a little. See! her hands are relaxing; her eyelids are quivering. Mariette, darling, can't you hear me? It is Louis who speaks to you."

The girl was, in fact, gradually recovering consciousness, and her tear-stained eyes, after having slowly opened and wandered aimlessly around for a moment, fixed themselves upon Louis. Soon, an expression of joyful surprise irradiated her features, and she murmured, faintly:

"Louis, is it really you? Ah, I never expected —"

Then, the sad reality gradually forcing itself upon her mind, she averted her face, and, letting her head again fall upon Madame Lacombe's bosom, she said, with a deep sigh:

"Ah, godmother, it is for the last time! All is over between us!"

"Didn't I tell you how it would be?" exclaimed Madame Lacombe. "Go, I tell you, go! Oh, the misery of being so weak and infirm that one cannot turn a scoundrel out of one's house!"

"Mariette," cried Louis, imploringly, "Mariette, in

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pity, listen to me. I do not come to bid you farewell ; on the contrary, I come to tell you that I love you better than ever ! ”

“ Good God ! ” exclaimed the young girl, starting up as if she had received an electric shock ; “ what does he say ? ”

“ I say that we are both the victims of a terrible mistake, Mariette. I have never for one moment ceased to love you, no, never ! and all the time I have been away I have had but one thought and desire,—to see you again and make all the necessary arrangements for our speedy marriage, as I told you in my letter.”

“ Your letter ! ” exclaimed Mariette, in heart-broken tones, “ he has forgotten. Here, Louis, here is your letter.”

And, as she spoke, she handed the young man the crumpled, tear-blurred fragments of the letter.

“ He will deny his own writing, see if he don’t,” muttered Madame Lacombe, as Louis hastily put the torn pieces together. “ And you will be fool enough to believe him.”

“ This is what I wrote, Mariette,” said Louis, after he had put the letter together :

“ ‘ MY DEAREST MARIETTE : — I shall be with you again the day after you receive this letter. The short absence, from which I have suffered so much, has convinced me that it is impossible for me to live separated from you. Thank God ! the day of our union is near at hand. To-morrow will be the sixth of May, and as soon as I return I shall tell my father of our intentions, and I do not doubt his consent.

“ ‘ Farewell, then, until day after to-morrow, my beloved Mariette. I love you madly, or rather wisely, for what greater wisdom could a man show than in having sought and found happiness in a love like yours.

“ ‘ Yours devotedly, LOUIS.

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“‘I write only these few lines because I shall reach Paris almost as soon as my letter, and because it is always painful to me to think that another must read what I write to you. But for that, how many things I would say to you. Yours for ever.

“‘L.’”

Mariette had listened to the letter with such profound astonishment that she had been unable to utter a word.

“That, Mariette, is what I wrote,” remarked Louis. “What was there in my letter to make you so wretched?”

“Is that really what was in the letter, M. Louis?” asked Madame Lacombe.

“See for yourself, madame,” said Louis, handing her the scraps of paper.

“Do you suppose I know how to read?” was the surly response. “How was it that the letter was read so differently to Mariette, then?”

“Who read my letter to you, Mariette?” asked Louis.

“A scrivener.”

“A scrivener!” repeated Louis, assailed by a sudden suspicion. “Explain, Mariette, I beg of you.”

“The explanation is very simple, M. Louis. I asked a scrivener on the Charnier des Innocents to write a letter to you. He wrote it, and just as he was about to put your address on it he overturned his inkstand on the letter, and was obliged to write it all over again. On my return home, I found your letter waiting for me; but having no one to read it to me in Augustine’s absence, I went back to the scrivener, a very kind and respectable old man, and asked him to read what you had written to me. He read it, or at least pretended to read it, for, according to him, you said that we must never meet again, that your future and that of your father demanded it, and for that reason you entreated me—”

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But the poor girl's emotion overcame her, and she burst into tears.

Louis understood now that chance had led Mariette to his father for assistance, that the pretended accident had been merely a stratagem that enabled the scrivener to write a second letter of an entirely different import from the first, and to address it, not to Dreux, but to Paris, so Louis would find it on his arrival in that city. He understood, too, his father's object in thus deceiving Mariette in regard to the real contents of the second letter, when she again applied to him. The discovery of this breach of confidence on the part of his father — the reason of which was only too apparent — overwhelmed Louis with sorrow and shame. He dared not confess to his sweetheart the relation that existed between him and the scrivener, but, wishing to give the two women some plausible explanation of the deception that had been practised upon them, he said :

"In spite of this scrivener's apparent kindness of heart, he must have taken a malicious pleasure in playing a joke upon you, my poor Mariette, for he read you the exact opposite of what I had written."

"How shameful!" cried the girl. "How could he have had the heart to deceive me so? He had such a benevolent air, and spoke so feelingly of the sympathy he always felt for those unfortunate persons who, like myself, could neither read nor write."

"But you can see for yourself that he did deceive you shamefully? Still, what does it matter, now?" added Louis, anxious to put an end to such a painful topic. "We understand each other's feelings now, Mariette, and —"

"One moment," interposed Madame Lacombe; "you may feel satisfied and reassured, Mariette, but I do not."

"What do you mean, godmother?"

"I mean that I strongly disapprove of this marriage."

"But listen, madame," pleaded Louis.

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“As you are the son of a public scrivener, you haven’t a sou to your name. Mariette hasn’t, either, and two people in such circumstances as that have no right to marry. My goddaughter has me to take care of. She would be sure, too, to have a lot of children, and a nice fix we should all be in!”

“But, godmother — ”

“Don’t talk to me. I know what you intend to do. The first thing you’ll try for is to get rid of the old woman. There won’t be bread enough for us all, and I shall be turned out into the street to be arrested as a public vagabond. I shall be sent to the workhouse, so you won’t be troubled with me any more. Oh, yes, I understand your scheme.”

“Oh, godmother, how can you imagine such a thing as that?”

“Dismiss all such fears from your mind, I beg of you, madame,” Louis made haste to say. “This very day I made a most unexpected discovery. My father, for reasons which I must respect, has concealed from me the fact that we are rich, very rich.”

Mariette manifested much more astonishment than delight on hearing this startling announcement, but turning to Madame Lacombe after a moment, she said :

“You see you need be troubled by no more of these terrible misgivings in regard to my future, godmother.”

“Ha, ha!” laughed Madame Lacombe, sardonically ; “so she really believes it — ”

“But, godmother — ”

“Nonsense, child, can’t you see that he has invented this story so I will consent to your marriage ?”

“But I swear, madame — ”

“I tell you it is all a lie,” exclaimed Madame Lacombe ; “for if you were as rich as you say, you wouldn’t want Mariette any longer. Would the son of a rich man be fool enough to marry a poor working girl who can neither read nor write ?”

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Though she did not exactly share her godmother's doubts, Mariette gazed at Louis a little sadly and uneasily, as she thought of the great change in his fortunes.

The young man must have understood the meaning of the look, for he said :

" You are very much mistaken, Madame Lacombe ; the son of a rich man keeps the promise he made as a poor man when the happiness of his life depends upon that promise."

" Bah ! that is all talk !" interrupted the invalid, in surly tones ; " but rich or poor, you won't get Mariette without I am sure of a living. I don't ask much,—six hundred francs a year will do, — but the money must be deposited in the hands of a reliable notary before the marriage contract is signed."

" Oh, godmother, have you no more confidence in Louis than that ? "

" A nice fix you'll find yourself in if you place confidence in any man," exclaimed the poor creature. " Oh, I know all about it. Before marriage they'll promise anything you ask ; afterward, they'll take the old woman by the arm, and drag her off to the poorhouse without saying so much as by your leave. I'm not afraid that Mariette would turn me into the street. I've been a sad burden to her, and she has had quite enough of me, I know, but she is a kind-hearted little thing ; besides, she's afraid of me ; but once married, she will side with her husband, and out I shall have to go. No, there sha'n't be any marriage unless I'm sure of six hundred francs a year."

While Madame Lacombe was indulging in these recriminations, Mariette and Louis exchanged sadly significant glances.

" You hear her, Louis," the girl seemed to say. " Was I not right when I told you that she had been hopelessly embittered by her many misfortunes ? "

" Poor Mariette," the young man seemed to say in

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reply, "how much you must have suffered! And how hard it is to see such tender and saint-like devotion as yours rewarded in such a way!"

"Madame," replied Louis, when the sick woman had ended her tirade, "you may rest assured that you shall be well provided for. Mariette and I will never forget that you took her in when she had no other home, and whether you prefer to live with us, or to live alone, you shall be made comfortable for life."

"Oh, thank you, Louis, thank you for sharing my feeling for my poor godmother, my second mother," exclaimed Mariette, gratefully.

And the girl bent over Madame Lacombe to embrace her, but the invalid, pushing her away, said, angrily:

"Can't you see that he is only amusing himself at our expense? Marry you? Pension me for life? Was such a thing ever heard of? He wants to get around me, that is all, and if he is rich, as he says he is, he will only fool you, and some fine day you'll hear of his marriage with another girl, so I forbid him ever to set foot in this house again."

"But you will at least allow me to present myself here in company with my father to make a formal request for Mariette's hand in marriage?"

"Oh, yes, when you come for that purpose it will be when two Sundays come together," answered the old woman, sneeringly.

"It will be to-morrow, Madame Lacombe."

Then, turning to the young girl, he added:

"Farewell, Mariette. I shall come to-morrow, accompanied by my father."

On hastening to his father's office a few moments afterward, Louis found it closed, and ascertained upon inquiry that M. Richard had not been there at all that day. Amazed at this strange change in the old man's regular habits, Louis hastened to the lodgings they shared in the Rue de Grenelle.

CHAPTER XI.

HIDDEN TREASURE.

As Louis was passing the porter's lodge, that functionary remarked to him :

" Your father went out a couple of hours ago, M. Louis. He left this note for you, which I was to take to the office where you are employed, if you did not return before two o'clock in the afternoon."

The young man took the note. It read as follows :

" MY DEAR SON :— I am in receipt of a few lines from my friend, Ramon, who apprises me of his intention of leaving Dreux in company with his daughter almost simultaneously with his letter. He will, consequently, reach Paris to-day. As he has never been on a railway in his life, and is anxious to try that mode of travel, he will stop at Versailles, and he wishes us to meet him there. We can visit the palace, and afterward come on to Paris together by one of the late trains.

" I am to meet Ramon at the Hôtel du Reservoir. If we should leave there to visit the palace before you arrive, you can easily find us. It is understood that this meeting with Mlle. Ramon is not to compromise you in the least. I merely desire that you should take advantage of this opportunity to see the injustice of your prejudice against that young lady. Besides, whatever your plans may be, you must realise that it would be very dis-

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courteous to Ramon, one of my most particular friends, to fail to keep the appointment he has made with us. So come, my dear Louis, if only for appearance's sake.

“ From your father who loves you, and who has but one desire in the world,— your happiness.

“ A. RICHARD.”

But Louis, in spite of the deference he usually showed to his father's wishes, did not go to Versailles, feeling the utter uselessness of another meeting with Mlle. Ramon, as he was now even more than ever determined to marry Mariette.

The discovery of his father's wealth made no change in the industrious habits of Louis, who hastened to the office to perform his usual duties, and apologise for his absence during the morning. A desire to atone for that, as well as the preparation of several important documents, kept him at the office much later than usual. As he was preparing to leave, one of his fellow clerks rushed in excitedly, exclaiming :

“ Ah, my friend, such a terrible calamity has occurred !”

“ What has happened ?”

“ There has been a frightful accident on the Versailles railroad.”

“ Good God ! ” exclaimed Louis, turning pale.

“ The Paris train was derailed, several cars were telescoped, they took fire, nearly all the passengers were either crushed or burned to death, and — ”

Louis could wait to hear no more. Forgetting his hat entirely, he rushed out of the office, and, running to a neighbouring cab-stand, he sprang into one of the vehicles, saying to the coachman :

“ Twenty francs *pourboire* if you take me to the Versailles railway station at the top of your speed,— and from there, but I don't know yet, — only start, in Heaven's name start at once ! ”

"On the right or left bank of the river, monsieur?" asked the coachman, gathering up the lines.

"What?"

"There are two roads, monsieur, one on the right, the other on the left bank of the river."

"I want to go to the road where that terrible accident just occurred."

"This is the first I have heard of it, monsieur."

Louis drove back to the office to inquire of the fellow clerk who had brought the news, but, finding no one there, he ran out and was about to enter the cab again when the driver said :

"I have just learned that the accident was on the left line, monsieur."

Louis accordingly ordered him to drive to that station. Here the sad news was confirmed. He also learned at what point on the line the accident had occurred. The main road and then a cross road enabled him to reach Bas Mendon about nightfall, and, guided by the blaze of the burning cars, he soon found the scene of the catastrophe.

The press of the time gave such graphic accounts of this frightful calamity that is not necessary to enter into further particulars; we will merely say that all night Louis searched in vain for his father among the charred, disfigured, and terribly mutilated bodies. About four o'clock in the morning the young man, overcome with grief and fatigue, returned to Paris, with a faint hope that his father might have been one of the few who had escaped injury, and that he might have returned home during the night.

The carriage had scarcely reached the house before Louis sprang out and ran to the porter's lodge.

"Has my father returned?" he exclaimed.

"No, M. Louis."

"Ah! there can be no further doubt, then," murmured Louis. "Dead! dead!"

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His knees gave way under him, and he was obliged to sit down. After resting a few moments in the room of the porter, who offered him the usual condolences, Louis went slowly up to his room.

On seeing the bare, poorly furnished room so long shared with a father who had loved him so devotedly, and who had just met with such a frightful death, Louis's grief became uncontrollable, and he threw himself down on the bed, and, burying his face in his hands, wept long and bitterly.

About half an hour afterward he heard some one knock at the door, and the porter entered.

"What do you want?" asked Louis.

"I am sorry to disturb you at such a time, monsieur, but the coachman —"

"What coachman?" asked Louis, who in his grief had forgotten all about the carriage.

"Why, the coachman you kept all night. He says you promised him twenty francs drink money, which, with his charge for yesterday afternoon and last night, makes forty-nine francs in all that you owe him, and he wants his money."

"Pay him and let him go!" responded the young man, with sorrowful impatience.

"But forty-nine francs is a large sum of money, and I haven't that much, M. Louis."

"Good Heavens! what is to be done?" exclaimed Louis, suddenly aroused by this demand of the material interests of life. "I have no money, either."

And he spoke the truth, for he had never had at his disposal one-fourth of the amount that he owed the coachman.

"Then why did you keep the carriage so long, and above all, why did you promise the driver such a large *pourboire*? You must be mad! What are you going to do? Hadn't you better see if there is any money in your father's desk?"

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These last words reminded Louis of a fact which, in his grief, he had entirely forgotten. His father was rich, and thinking that there might be some money concealed somewhere in the room, but not wishing to institute a search for it in the porter's presence, he said :

“ I may need the cab again this morning, so tell the man to wait. If I am not down in half an hour, you can come back again, and I will give you the money.”

The porter went out, and the young man, thus left alone, experienced a feeling almost akin to remorse, as he thought of the search he was about to make,—a search which at such a moment seemed almost sacrilege, but necessity left him no choice.

The furniture of the room consisted of a writing-desk, a bureau, and a big chest similar to those seen in the houses of well-to-do peasants, and which was divided into two compartments, one above the other.

Louis examined the desk and bureau, but found no money in either of them. The keys of the chest were in their respective locks. He opened both compartments, but saw only a few articles of clothing. A long drawer separated the two compartments. In this drawer there was nothing except a few unimportant papers ; but the idea that there might be some secret compartment occurred to Louis, so he took the drawer out of the chest, and proceeded to examine it. A careful search resulted in the discovery of a small brass knob in the left side of the drawer. He pressed this knob, and immediately saw the board which apparently formed the bottom of the drawer move slowly out, disclosing to view another opening below, about four inches deep, and extending the entire length of the drawer. This space was partitioned off into a number of small compartments, and each of these compartments was filled with piles of gold pieces of different denominations and nationalities. It was evident that each coin must have been carefully

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polished, for they all sparkled as brilliantly as if they had just come out of the mint.

Louis, in spite of his profound grief, stood a moment as if dazzled at the sight of this treasure, the value of which he knew must be very considerable. On recovering from his surprise a little, he noticed a paper in the first compartment, and, recognising his father's handwriting, he read these words :

“ This collection of gold pieces was begun on the 7th of September, 1803. Its market value is 287,634 francs, 10 centimes. See Clause IV. of my will, entrusted to the keeping of Master Marainville, No. 28 Rue St. Anne, with whom is likewise deposited all my title-deeds, mortgages, stocks, and bonds. See also the sealed envelope under the piles of Spanish double pistoles, in fifth compartment.”

Louis removed several piles of the large, heavy coins designated, and found an envelope sealed with black.

Upon this envelope was written in bold characters :

“ *To My Dearly-beloved Son.*”

Just as Louis picked up the envelope some one knocked at the door, and remembering that he had told the porter to return, he had barely time to take out one of the coins and close the chest before that functionary entered.

The porter examined the coin which the young man handed to him with quite as much surprise as curiosity, exclaiming, with a wondering air :

“ What a handsome gold piece ! One would suppose it had just been coined. I never saw one like it before.”

“ Go and pay the cabman with it ! ”

“ But how much is a big gold piece like this worth, monsieur ? ”

“ More than I owe. Go and get it changed, and pay the coachman.”

“ Did your father leave many of these big gold pieces,

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M. Richard?" asked the porter, in a mysterious tone.
"Who would have supposed that old man—"

"Go!" thundered Louis, exasperated at the heartlessness of the question, "go and pay the coachman, and don't come back."

The porter beat a hasty retreat, and Louis, to guard against further intrusion, locked the door and returned to the chest.

Before opening his father's letter the young man, almost in spite of himself, gazed for a moment at the glittering treasure, but this time, though he reproached himself for the thought at such a moment, he remembered Mariette, and said to himself that one-fourth of the wealth that was lying there before him would assure his wife's comfort and independence for life.

Then he tried to forget the cruel stratagem his father had resorted to, and even comforted himself with the thought that he should have secured the old man's consent to his marriage with Mariette eventually, and that, though he might not have confessed to the wealth he possessed, he would at least have provided comfortably for the young couple.

The discovery of this treasure excited in Louis's breast none of that avaricious or revengeful joy that the heirs of misers often feel when they think of the cruel privations a parent's avarice has imposed upon them.

On the contrary, it was with devout respect that the young man broke the seal of the letter which doubtless contained his aged father's last wishes.

CHAPTER XII.

A VOICE FROM THE GRAVE.

THIS communication, dated about two months before, read as follows :

“ MY BELOVED SON :— When you read these lines I shall have ceased to live.

“ You have always believed me to be poor ; on the contrary, I leave you a large fortune accumulated by avarice.

“ I have been a miser. I do not deny it. On the contrary, I glory in the fact.

“ And these are my reasons :

“ Up to the time of your birth, — which deprived me of your mother, — I had, without being extravagant, been indifferent about increasing either my own patrimony or the dowry my wife had brought me ; but as soon as I had a son, that desire to make ample provision for him which is the sacred duty of every parent gradually aroused a spirit of economy, then of parsimony, and finally of avarice, in my breast.

“ Besides, the privations I imposed upon myself did not affect you in your infancy. Born sturdy and robust, the wholesome simplicity of your bringing up was rather beneficial than otherwise, tending as it did to the development of an excellent constitution.

“ When you were old enough to begin your education, I sent you to one of the best schools open to the poor, at first, I must admit, purely from motives of economy, but afterward, because I considered such a training the

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best preparation for an honest, industrious life. The success of this plan even exceeded my expectations. Reared with the children of the poor, you acquired none of those luxurious, extravagant tastes, and felt none of the bitter envy and jealousy, that so often exert a fatal influence upon a young man's future. You were thus spared much of the chagrin which is no less bitter because the victim of it is a child.

"It is generally supposed that because children of entirely different conditions in life wear the same uniform, eat at the same table, and pursue the same studies, a feeling of equality exists between them.

"This is a great mistake.

"Social inequality is as keenly felt among children as in the social world.

"The son of a wealthy tradesman or a great nobleman generally displays the same pride and arrogance at ten years of age as at twenty-five.

"As for you, reared with children of the people, you heard them all talk of the hard toil of their parents, and the necessity of labour was thus impressed upon your mind almost from infancy.

"Other schoolmates told of the privations and poverty which the members of their households were obliged to endure, and in this way you became accustomed to our poverty.

"At the age of fifteen, I made you compete for a scholarship in the admirable institution in which you completed your studies, and your early education already began to bear excellent fruits, for, though many of your schoolmates were wealthy or of noble lineage, contact with them never impaired your sterling qualities, or made you envious or discontented.

"At the age of seventeen you entered the office of a notary, an intimate friend of mine, who alone knows the secret of my great wealth, and who has charge of my investments. Up to this time, this friend's discretion

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has equalled his devotion, and, thanks to him, you have acquired a fair knowledge of law, and also of business methods, which will be of immense service to you in the management of the very handsome property I have amassed.

“ My conscience does not reproach me in the least, consequently, though sometimes I admit I fear you may address this reproach to my memory :

“ ‘ While you were amassing all this wealth, father, how could you bear to see me subjected to such cruel privations ? ’

“ But the recollection of the many times you have remarked to me that, though we were poor, you were perfectly contented, and that you craved wealth only for my sake, always drove this fear from my heart.

“ In fact, your invariable good humour, the evenness of your disposition, your natural gaiety, and your devoted affection for me have always convinced me that you were contented with your lot; besides, I shared it. What I earned as a scrivener, together with your earnings, have enabled us to live without touching any of the income from my property, which has consequently been accumulating in prudent hands for the last twenty years, so at this present writing the fortune I leave to you amounts to over two millions and a half.

“ I do not know how many more years I have to live, but if I live ten years longer I shall have reached the allotted age of man. You will be thirty-five, and I shall have amassed a fortune of four or five millions, as property doubles itself in ten years.

“ So, in all probability, you will have reached middle age when you come into possession of this large property, and the sober, frugal, and laborious habits acquired in infancy will have become second nature with you; so will you not be in the best possible condition to inherit the wealth I have amassed for you, and to use it wisely and well ?

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“If I had acted differently, what benefit would have accrued to either of us ?

“If I had been lavish in my expenditures, I should have reduced you to poverty.

“If I had contented myself with spending my income only, then, instead of devoting ourselves to some useful employment, we should probably have led idle, aimless lives ; instead of living frugally, we should have indulged in luxuries and more or less vain display ; in short, we should have led such a life as nearly all wealthy people of the middle class lead.

“And what should we have gained by it ?

“Should we have been better or more useful citizens ? I doubt it, and, at my death, I should have left you a small property, not sufficient for the realisation of any extensive or generous enterprise.

“One word more, my dear child, to answer in advance any reproach that you may in future address to my memory.

“Rest assured if I kept my wealth a secret from you, it was not from any desire to deceive you, nor from any distrust on my part.

“These were my reasons :

“Ignorant of my wealth, you were resigned to poverty ; aware of our wealth, you might have accepted the humble existence I imposed upon you without murmuring, but in your secret heart you might have accused me of cruelty and selfishness.

“Nor was this all. Forgive, my son, this foolish fear,—this apprehension so insulting to your affectionate heart,—but during my lifetime I was loath that you should know that you would profit by my death.

“Another, and possibly the most potent reason of all, led me to conceal my wealth from you. I love you so much that it would have been impossible for me to see you subjected to the slightest privation had you known

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it depended only upon me to give you an easier, broader, and more luxurious life.

"In spite of the apparent contradiction between this feeling and my avaricious conduct toward you, I hope that you will understand me.

"And now that in thought I place myself face to face with death, which may strike me down to-morrow, to-day, this very hour, I solemnly declare that I bless you from the inmost depths of my soul, my beloved son. You have never given me one moment's pain or sorrow, but only joy and happiness.

"God for ever bless you, my good and loving son. If you are as happy as you deserve to be, the dearest wish of my heart will be gratified.

"Your father, A. RICHARD.
"Paris, February 25, 18—."

Deeply touched by this strange letter, Louis fell into a deep, sad reverie, and the day was nearing a close when the young man heard some one knock at the door of his garret, and the well-known voice of Florestan de Saint-Herem greeted his ears.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MISER EXTOLLED.

SAINT-HEREM threw himself in his friend's arms, exclaiming :

“ Louis, my poor friend, I know all. The porter just told me of your father's death. What a sudden and cruel blow ! ”

“ Read this, Florestan, and you will understand how bitter my regret must be ! ” said Louis, brokenly, handing Saint-Herem the dead man's letter.

“ Now do you think any one can blame my father for his avarice ? ” Louis asked, when his friend had finished the letter. “ His one thought seems to have been to enrich me, and to prepare me to make a good use of the large property he would bequeath to me. It was for my sake that he hoarded his wealth, and imposed the hardest privations upon himself ! ”

“ No sacrifice is too great for a miser,” replied Florestan. “ Misers are capable of the grandest and most heroic acts. This may seem a paradox to you, but it is true, nevertheless. The prejudice against misers is unjust in the extreme. Misers ! Why, we ought to erect altars to them ! ” added Saint-Herem, with growing enthusiasm. “ Is it not wonderful the ingenuity they display in devising all sorts of ways to save ? Is it not marvellous to see them accumulating, by persistent efforts, a fortune from the ends of matches and the collecting of lost pins. And people deny the existence of alchemists, and of discoverers of the philosopher's stone ! ”

THE MISER EXTOLLED.

Why, the miser has found the philosopher's stone, for does he not make gold out of what would be worthless to others?"

" You are right in that respect, Florestan."

" In that respect and all other respects, for, Louis, observe my simile closely. It is wonderfully just and worthy of my best rhetorical efforts. There is a dry and sterile tract of land. Some one digs a well there. What is the result? The smallest springs, the almost imperceptible oozings from the earth, the tiniest threads of water, accumulate drop by drop in this well. Gradually the water deepens, the reservoir becomes full, then comes a beneficent hand that diffuses the contents all around, and flowers and verdure spring up as if by enchantment on this once barren soil. Say, Louis, is not my comparison a just one? Is not the wealth amassed by the miser almost always spent in luxuries of every kind? for, as the proverb says: 'An avaricious father, a spendthrift son.' And let us consider the miser from a religious point of view."

" From a religious point of view?"

" Yes; for it is seen from that standpoint that he is especially worthy of praise."

" That is a very difficult assertion to prove, it seems to me."

" On the contrary, it is extremely easy. Self-abnegation is one of the greatest of virtues, is it not?"

" Undoubtedly."

" Well, my dear Louis, I defy you to mention any monastic order whose members renounce all earthly pleasures as absolutely as the majority of misers do. Capuchins renounce champagne, race-horses, dancing girls, hunting, cards, and the opera. I should think so. Most of them have good reasons for it. But how different with the miser! There, in his coffers, under lock and key, are the means of gratifying every wish and indulging in every luxury and pleasure, and yet he pos-

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seses the moral courage and strength of will to resist all these temptations. In his disinterestedness, too, the miser is sublime."

"Disinterestedness, Florestan?"

"Yes, I repeat that his disinterestedness is sublime. He knows perfectly well that he is execrated during life, and that his heirs will dance upon his grave when he is dead. He knows all that, and yet, mention a single case where a miser has tried to take his treasure with him, though it would be an easy matter, as it wouldn't take five minutes to burn two millions in banknotes. But no, these kind-hearted misers, full of compassion, practise forgiveness of injuries, and leave their vast wealth to their heirs in almost every case."

"But, my friend, it sounds very strangely to hear a person who spends money as lavishly as you do lauding avarice to the skies."

"All the more reason that I should."

"And why?"

"Who can appreciate the excellence of the armourer's work as well as the warrior? the excellence of a horse as well the rider? the excellence of a musical instrument as well as the person who plays upon it? Pope Paganini has canonised Stradivarius, the maker of those wonderful violins the great artist plays so divinely; and I, who could spend millions so admirably, shall certainly feel like canonising my uncle—that heroic martyr to avarice—if Fate so wills that the means of prodigality which he had been accumulating penny by penny ever falls into my hands."

"My God!"

"What is the matter, Louis?"

"Then you do not know—"

"What?"

"I told you of my poor father's desire for a marriage between me and your cousin."

"Yes, what of it?"

THE MISER EXTOLLED.

“Your uncle, ignorant of my refusal, and anxious to hasten this union which he desired as ardently as my father, apparently, left Dreux yesterday, in company with his daughter, and this morning—”

“Both arrived in Paris, I suppose. Why this hesitation, my dear Louis?”

“Your uncle and cousin did not come straight through to Paris. They stopped at Versailles, Florestan, at Versailles, where my poor father went to—”

But Louis could not finish the sentence. His emotion overcame him completely.

“Courage, my friend,” said Saint-Herem, deeply affected, “I understand your feelings.”

“Florestan,” said the young man, drying his tears, after a long silence, “my father went to Versailles to meet your uncle and cousin.”

“Well?”

“It was agreed that they were to accompany my father back to Paris. There is little doubt that they did so, and as it is almost certain that they were all in the same railway carriage—”

“They, too! Oh, that would be too horrible!” exclaimed Saint-Herem, covering his face with his hands.

The exclamation of horror and the tone of profound pity in Saint-Herem’s voice were so sincere and so spontaneous that Louis was deeply touched by this proof of noble-heartedness on the part of his friend, who had manifested only a feeling of generous commiseration, without one particle of the satisfaction or selfish joy that might have been considered almost excusable under the circumstances.

CHAPTER XIV.

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE.

LOUIS and Saint-Herem remained silent for several minutes. The former was the first to speak.

"I cannot tell you how deeply your sensibility touches me, my dear Florestan," he said, at last. "It is so thoroughly in accord with my own feelings at this sad moment."

"Why, what else could you expect, my dear friend ? I had no affection for my uncle, as you know, but one must be heartless, indeed, not to feel deeply grieved and horrified at the mere possibility that my relatives may have shared your poor father's cruel fate. I retract nothing I have said in regard to avarice and its far-reaching consequences, though it would have given my thoughts a much more serious turn had I foreseen that the question was to affect me personally ; but I can at least say, with truth, that I am not one of those persons who receive an inheritance with unalloyed delight. Now tell me, Louis,—and forgive the necessity of a question that is sure to revive your grief,—in your sorrowful search for your father did you see nothing that would lead you to hope that my uncle and his daughter might have escaped such a horrible death ?"

"All I can say, Florestan, is that I remember perfectly having seen neither your uncle nor cousin among the killed and injured. As for the unfortunate persons who shared my father's fate, it was impossible to identify any of them, as they were burned almost to ashes."

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"Then your supposition is probably correct, my poor Louis, as my uncle and his daughter are almost certain to have been in the same carriage as your father, and even in the same compartment. In that case, there can be little doubt that they met with the same fate. I shall write to Dreux at once, and I shall also have a careful search for their remains instituted without delay. If you hear anything more, inform me as soon as possible. But now I think of it, how about Mariette? The sad announcement you have just made to me almost made me forget the object of my visit."

"It was a cruel misunderstanding that caused all the trouble, as I suspected, Florestan. I found her more loving and devoted than ever."

"Her love will be a great consolation to you in your deep sorrow. Courage, my poor Louis, courage! All that has occurred should only serve to strengthen the bonds of friendship between us."

"Ah, Florestan, but for this friendship and Mariette's affection, I do not know how I could endure this crushing blow. Farewell, my friend. Keep me advised of the progress of your search for your uncle, I beg of you."

The two friends separated. Left alone, Louis reflected some time in regard to the course he should pursue. Finally he placed in his satchel the hidden gold he had just discovered, then, taking his father's letter, he repaired to the house of his employer, who was also the business agent and friend of his deceased parent, as he had just learned from the letter found with the gold.

The notary, deeply affected by the harrowing details of his late patron's terrible fate, tried to console Louis, and also offered to attend to the necessary legal formalities.

This arrangement made, Louis said:

"There is another question I should like to ask. As

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soon as these formalities have been complied with, do I come into possession of my father's property?"

"Certainly, my dear Louis."

"Then I will tell you what I intend to do. I have brought you gold coin to the amount of more than two hundred thousand francs. I found it in a chest in the room I occupied with my father. Out of this amount, I wish you to take enough to purchase an annuity of twelve thousand francs for the godmother of a young girl that I am about to marry."

"But does this young girl's financial condition —"

"My dear patron," interrupted Louis, respectfully but firmly, "the young girl I speak of is a working girl, and supports herself and her godmother by her daily toil. I have loved her a long time, and no human power can prevent me from marrying her."

"So be it," replied the notary, understanding the uselessness of any further protest. "I will settle the desired amount upon the person designated."

"I also desire to take from this sum of money about fifteen thousand francs to set up housekeeping in a suitable manner."

"Only fifteen thousand francs!" exclaimed the notary, surprised at the modesty of this request. "Will that be enough?"

"My affianced wife is, like myself, accustomed to a frugal and laborious life, so the income from fifteen thousand francs, together with the proceeds of our labour, will more than suffice."

"The proceeds of your labour! What! do you intend —"

"To remain in your office if you do not consider me unworthy of your confidence."

"Remain a notary's clerk when you have an income of more than two hundred thousand francs a year?"

"I cannot and will not take possession of this immense fortune for a long time to come. Even when

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the death of my father has been legally established, I shall still feel a vague hope of again seeing the parent I so deeply mourn."

"Alas! I fear there is little hope of that, my poor Louis."

"Still, I shall cherish the hope as long as possible; and so long as I do, I shall not consider myself at liberty to dispose of my father's property,—at least only to the extent I have indicated to you. Will you not, therefore, continue to take charge of the estate exactly as you have done in the past?"

"I cannot but admire the course you have decided upon, my dear Louis," replied the notary, with unfeigned emotion. "Your conduct now conforms in every respect with that you have always maintained. You could not do greater honour to your father's memory than by acting thus. It shall be as you wish. I will remain the custodian of your fortune, and the annuity you spoke of shall be purchased this very day."

"There is a detail in relation to that matter, about which I should like to speak, trivial and almost absurd as it may appear to you."

"What do you mean?"

"The poor woman upon whom I desire to settle this annuity has seen so much trouble during her long life that her character has become embittered, and she feels no confidence in any one. Any promise would seem utterly valueless to her, if the promise was not based upon something tangible; so to convince the poor creature, I want to take her fifteen thousand francs in gold, which will represent very nearly the amount that will have to be expended for the annuity. It is the only way to thoroughly convince the poor creature of my good intentions."

"Take any amount you please, of course, my dear Louis. The matter shall be arranged to-morrow."

CHAPTER XV.

MADAME LACOMBE'S UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER.

ON leaving the notary's office, Louis hastened to Mariette's home. He found the young girl sewing by the bedside of her godmother, who seemed to be sound asleep.

Her lover's extreme pallor, as well as the sad expression of his face, struck the young girl at once, and running toward him, she exclaimed, anxiously:

"Oh, Louis, something terrible must have happened, I am sure."

"Yes, Mariette. Have you heard of the frightful accident that occurred on the Versailles railroad yesterday?"

"Yes, it was horrible. People say there were nobody knows how many victims."

"I can hardly doubt that my father was one of the number."

Quick as thought, Mariette threw herself, sobbing, on Louis's breast, and for a long time the two stood clasped in a silent embrace. Louis was the first to speak.

"Mariette, you know how devotedly I loved my father, so you can judge of my despair," he said, sadly.

"It is a terrible blow to you, I know, Louis."

"The only consolation I have is your love, Mariette, and I am about to ask a fresh proof of this love."

"You have but to speak, Louis."

"I want you to marry me at once."

"Can you doubt my consent? Is this the proof of love that you asked?" inquired the young girl.

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Then, after a moment's reflection, she added :

" But can we marry before your period of mourning, that only begins to-day, expires ? "

" I entreat you, Mariette, not to be deterred by that scruple, decent as it appears."

" I — I will do whatever you wish."

" Listen, Mariette, my heart will be torn with regrets for a long, long time. True mourning is of the soul, and, with me, it will long exceed the period fixed by custom. I know that I honour my father's memory in every fibre of my being, and it is for this very reason that I do not feel it necessary to conform to any purely conventional custom. Believe me, a marriage contracted at so sad a time as this is of a much more solemn and sacred nature than if we married under different circumstances."

" You are right, perhaps, Louis ; nevertheless, custom — "

" Because you will be my wife, Mariette,— because you will mourn for my father with me,— because you will share my grief, will he be less deeply regretted ? Besides, Mariette, crushed with grief, as I am, I could not live on alone, separated from you,— all I have left in the world now. It would kill me."

" I am only a poor seamstress who knows little or nothing of the laws of society, so I can only tell you how I feel about this matter, Louis. Though a moment ago the idea of marrying you at once seemed almost a breach of propriety, the reasons you give have made me change my mind. Possibly I am wrong ; possibly it is the desire to please you that influences me, but now I should not feel the slightest remorse if I married you at once, and yet it seems to me that I am as susceptible as any one I know."

" Yes, and more ungrateful than any one I know," exclaimed Madame Lacombe, tartly, raising herself up in bed.

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Then, seeing the surprise depicted on the features of her goddaughter and Louis, she added, in sneering tones :

“ Yes, you thought the old woman asleep, and so took advantage of the opportunity to decide all about the wedding, but I heard everything you said, everything — ”

“ There was nothing said that we were unwilling for you to hear, madame,” replied Louis, gravely. “ Mariette and I have no desire to retract a single word we have uttered.”

“ I am certain of that, for you two think only of yourselves. You seem to have no other idea in your head except this detestable marriage. As for me, one might suppose I was already in my coffin. I tell you once for all that — ”

“ Permit me to interrupt you, madame,” said Louis, “ and to prove to you that I have not forgotten my promise.”

As he spoke, he took a small box which he had deposited upon the table at his entrance, and placed it on Madame Lacombe’s bed, saying, as he handed her a key :

“ Will you be kind enough to open this box, madame ? The contents belong to you.”

Madame Lacombe took the key with a suspicious air, opened the box, looked in, and exclaimed, like one both dazzled and stupefied :

“ Good God ! Good God ! ”

Recovering from her bewilderment at last, the sick woman emptied the contents of the box out upon the bed ; but it seemed as if she could not believe her eyes when she saw the big pile of glittering gold coins before her.

“ Oh, what a pile of gold ! What a pile of gold ! ” she exclaimed, ecstatically. “ And it is real gold — not a counterfeit piece among it. Great Heavens ! What big, handsome coins they are ! They must be one hundred

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sou pieces at least. What an immense amount of money this must be! Enough to make two poor women like Mariette and me comfortable for life," she added, with a sigh.

"You have about fifteen thousand francs there, madame," replied Louis. "They are yours."

"Mine?" cried the sick woman, "mine?"

Then, shaking her head with an incredulous air, she said, sharply, "Why do you want to mock an old woman? How can this gold belong to me?"

"Because this gold is to purchase you an annuity of twelve hundred francs, so that, after Mariette's marriage, you can live alone or remain with your goddaughter as you prefer, for to-morrow our marriage contract will be signed, and, at the same time, you will receive papers assuring you a yearly income of twelve hundred francs in exchange for this gold. I brought the money here to convince you of the sincerity of my promises. Now, madame, as you overheard our conversation, you know my reasons for entreating Mariette to hasten our marriage. You are comfortably provided for now. If there is any other obstacle to my union with Mariette, tell us, I beseech you, madame. Anything that either she or I can do to satisfy you, we will do. Our happiness will not be complete if you, too, are not content."

The words were uttered in a kind, almost affectionate tone, but Mother Lacombe's only reply was a heavy sigh, as she turned her back upon the speaker.

Louis and Mariette gazed at each other in silent astonishment for a moment; then the girl, kneeling by the invalid's bedside, asked, tenderly:

"What is the matter, godmother?"

Receiving no reply, Mariette leaned over the old woman, and, seeing tears trickling through her wasted fingers, exclaimed :

"Good Heavens, Louis, my godmother is weeping. This is the first time in ten years!"

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"What is the matter, madame? Tell us, in Heaven's name."

"I appear like a beggar. I seem to be thinking only of money, and I am ashamed of it," responded the poor creature, sobbing bitterly. "Yes, you think I care only for money; you think I am selling Mariette to you exactly as I would have sold her to that villain, if I had been a bad woman."

"Do not say that, godmother," exclaimed Mariette, embracing the invalid tenderly. "Can you suppose for one moment that Louis and I had any intention of humiliating you by bringing you this money? Louis has done what you asked, that is all."

"I know that, but it was the fear of dying in the street, and of seeing you after marriage far more miserable than you are now, that made me ask for this money. I knew very well that I had no right to any money, but think what it must be to be afraid of being turned into the street when one is old and infirm. I asked for entirely too much, and I did very wrong. What do I really need? Only a mattress in some corner, and a morsel to eat now and then, and, above all, that Mariette will not desert me. I am so used to seeing her around. If she left me I should feel as lonely as if I were in the grave. Besides, there is nobody else in the world who would be so kind and so patient with a cross old sick woman like me. All I ask is to stay with Mariette. To have all this gold thrown in my face, as it were, humiliates me. One may be a mere worm, and yet have a little pride left. When that scoundrel came and offered me gold if I would sell Mariette to him, it made me mad, that is all; but this time it is very different, it makes me weep,—a thing I haven't done before for ten years, as you said yourself, child. This cuts me to the heart."

"Come, come, my dear Madame Lacombe, you need not give yourself the slightest uneasiness with regard to the future," said Louis, deeply touched. "Mariette will

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not leave you ; we will all live, not luxuriously, but very comfortably together."

"Are you in earnest ? Will you let me live with you, really and truly ?"

At this fresh proof of the unfortunate woman's unconquerable distrust, Louis and Mariette again exchanged compassionate glances, and taking her godmother's hand, the girl said, tenderly :

"Yes, godmother, yes ; we will keep you with us, and care for you as if you were our own mother. You shall see if we do not make you very, very happy."

"It will be no fault of ours if we do not, you may be sure of that," added Louis, earnestly.

The tone and expression of the two young people would have convinced the most skeptical, but it was so hard for this unfortunate woman to believe that such happiness could ever be hers, that, though she tried to conceal her doubts for fear of wounding Mariette and her lover, it was with an involuntary sigh that she replied :

"I believe you, children. Yes, I believe that M. Louis has money, and I believe you both mean well toward me, but after awhile I am afraid you'll find me very much in the way. Newly married people like to be alone, and — "

"What, godmother, you still doubt us, after all we have said ?"

"Forgive me, children, I don't mean to," sobbed the poor woman ; then, with a heart-broken smile, she added : "Perhaps it is all the better for me that I do doubt, for if, after fifty years of trouble and poverty, I should really come to believe that there was such a thing as happiness for me, I might go mad."

Then, in accents of inexpressible bitterness, she added :

"It wouldn't surprise me if I did. It would be just my luck."

CHAPTER XVI.

A CAPRICIOUS BEAUTY.

FIVE years have elapsed since the events we have just related, and on the evening of the 12th of May, 18— the anniversary of the terrible catastrophe on the Versailles railroad, the following scene was taking place.

It was half-past nine in the evening, and a young woman about twenty-five years of age, a decided brunette, with a perfect figure, and a remarkably spirituelle and high-bred face, was just completing a superb evening toilet with the assistance of two maids, one of whom had just clasped a necklace of diamonds as big as hazelnuts around the neck of her beautiful mistress, while another adjusted a magnificent diadem of the same costly gems upon the lady's beautiful black hair. The low corsage, too, of pale green satin, trimmed with superb lace and bows of pale pink satin ribbon, also glittered with precious stones.

The selection of diamonds as ornaments seemed to have been the result of careful reflection, for on a table close by were several cases containing complete and no less costly garnitures. Two of them, one composed of enormous rubies, the other of magnificent pearls of extraordinary size and lustre, would have excited the admiration of any jeweller.

One of the attendants, who was much older than her companion, seemed — thanks, probably, to her long service — to be on quite familiar terms with her mistress, who, like herself was a Russian, and the other maid, a young Frenchwoman, not understanding the

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Russian language, consequently heard without understanding the following conversation between the Comtesse Zomaloff and her trusted maid, Mlle. Katinka :

“ Does madame like the way in which I have adjusted her diadem ? ”

“ Very well,” replied the countess.

And with a final glance in the glass, she added, as she rose :

“ Where is my bouquet ? ”

“ Here, madame.”

“ What, that horrid withered thing ! ” cried Madame Zomaloff.

“ It is the one M. le duc sent for madame la comtesse.”

“ I recognise his taste,” said Madame Zomaloff, shrugging her shoulders. Then she added, with a mocking air, “ It is one he picked up at a bargain, I’ll be bound. Some lover who quarrelled with his sweetheart yesterday morning failed to send last evening for the bouquet he had ordered. It takes M. de Riancourt to discover such bargains.”

“ Ah, madame cannot suppose M. le duc is as stingy as all that. He is so rich.”

“ All the more reason that he should be.”

Some one rapped at the door of the chamber adjoining the dressing-room, and the French maid who went to answer the summons returned in a moment to say :

“ M. le Duc de Riancourt has come, and is awaiting madame’s pleasure.”

“ Let him wait,” replied Madame Zomaloff. “ The princess is in the drawing-room, I suppose.”

“ Yes, madame la comtesse.”

“ Very well. Here, Katinka, fasten this bracelet,” continued the young woman, holding out her beautiful arm. “ What time is it ? ”

But as Katinka was about to reply, Madame Zomaloff added, with a mocking smile :

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"After all, what is the use of asking that question ? The duke has just arrived, consequently it must be exactly half after nine."

The clock on the mantel interrupted the countess by striking the half-hour designated, and the lady laughed heartily as she exclaimed :

"What did I tell you, Katinka ? M. de Riancourt is as punctual as the clock itself."

"That only proves his ardour and his love."

"I should prefer a less well-regulated emotion, I think. Persons who adore you at a stated time always seem to me to have a watch in place of a heart. Hand me a smelling-bottle,—no, not that one. Yes, this one will do. I am almost sorry that I am dressed, so I cannot keep the poor duke waiting longer to punish him for his tiresome punctuality."

"Why, madame, how unjust you are to him ! Why do you marry him if you feel this way toward him ?"

"Why do I marry M. de Riancourt ?" the countess replied, as she took one more look in the mirror. "You have more curiosity than I have, Katinka. Does any woman ever know why she marries a second time ?"

"The reason seems apparent to every one. The duke, though he has no gold mines in the Crimea, and no silver mines in the Ural Mountains—"

"Spare me this tiresome enumeration of my worldly possessions, Katinka."

"Well, madame, though M. le duc cannot boast of such immense possessions as you have, he is one of the wealthiest and most powerful noblemen in France. He is young and good-looking ; he has not led a life of dissipation like so many other young men ; on the contrary, he is very devout, and —"

"Oh, yes, he is a paragon of virtue, of course. Bring me a heavy wrap ; the nights are still cool."

"Has madame any orders to give for the twentieth ?"

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“Orders?”

“Is it possible that madame forgets her marriage is to take place one week from to-morrow?”

“What! as soon as that?”

“Certainly, madame. You decided on the twentieth of May, and this is the twelfth.”

“If I said the twentieth, it will have to be the twentieth. But how strange it is. One is leading a delightful life; one is young and free, and one hates restraint, and yet one cannot give oneself another master too soon.”

“A master? A man as kind and gentle as M. le due? Why, you can make whatever you please of him, madame!”

“I shall never make a charming man of him, and yet I shall marry him. Ah, aunt, aunt, you are responsible for all this. There is one good thing about it, though. One will at least escape the bother of having to ask oneself what one had better do.”

The countess proceeded in a leisurely fashion to the drawing-room, where she found her aunt and the Duc de Riancourt awaiting her.

The Princesse Wileska, Madame Zomaloff’s aunt, was a tall, distinguished-looking woman, with gray hair which she wore slightly powdered. The Duc de Riancourt was a small man, about thirty years of age, with a thin, rather crooked neck, long, straight hair parted in the middle, a somewhat sanctimonious air, and eyes set rather obliquely, while his slow, precise movements indicated a remarkable amount of self-control.

When Madame Zomaloff entered the room, he advanced to meet her, bowed profoundly, and raised nearly to his lips the pretty hand the countess carelessly offered him, then, straightening himself up, he gazed at her a moment as if dazzled, exclaiming:

“Ah, madame la comtesse, I never saw you arrayed in all your diamonds before! I do not believe there are any other diamonds like them in the world. How

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beautiful they are ! Good Heavens ! how beautiful they are ! ”

“ Really, my dear duke, you quite overpower me by your admiration — for my diamonds ; and as my necklace and diadem arouse such tender emotion in your breast and inspire you with such graceful compliments, I will tell you, in strict confidence, the name of my jeweller. It is Ezekiel Rabotautencraff, of Frankfort.”

While M. de Riancourt was trying to find some suitable response to Madame Zomaloff’s raillery, the aunt of that young lady gave the duke a reproachful look, remarking, with a forced smile :

“ See how this mischievous Fedora delights in teasing you. It is a very common way of concealing the affection one feels for people, I believe.”

“ I humbly admit, my dear princess, that, dazzled by these magnificent jewels, I failed to render due homage to their wearer,” said M. de Riancourt, in the hope of repairing his blunder. “ But — but may not a person be so dazzled by the sun as to be unable to see even the most beautiful of flowers ? ”

“ I am so impressed by this comparison of yours that I am almost tempted to believe that the same glaring sunshine you speak of must have withered these poor blossoms,” retorted the mischievous young woman with a gay laugh, holding up for the duke’s inspection the rather faded bouquet he had sent her.

That gentleman blushed up to his very ears ; the princess frowned with an impatient air, while the countess, perfectly indifferent to these signs of disapproval, coolly remarked, as she walked toward the door :

“ Give your arm to my aunt, M. de Riancourt. I promised my friend, the wife of the Russian ambassador, that I would be at her house very early, as she wishes to present me to one of her relatives, and you know we have first to inspect that wonderful mansion — that enchanted palace everybody is talking about.”

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After waiting a few seconds in the vestibule, the countess and her aunt saw a clumsy landau, drawn by two emaciated horses, lumber up to the door, and the young widow, turning to the duke in evident surprise, said :

“ Why, this is not your carriage ! What has become of that dark blue berlin drawn by two handsome gray horses that you placed at our disposal yesterday morning ? ”

“ Under the circumstances I feel no hesitation about confessing a little detail of domestic economy to you, my dear countess,” replied the duke, with touching naïveté. “ To save my grays, for which I was obliged to pay a good round sum, I assure you, I always hire a carriage in the evening. It is very much more economical than to risk one’s own turnout at night.”

“ And you are perfectly right, my dear duke,” the princess hastened to say, fearing another shaft of ridicule from her niece. M. de Riancourt’s footman was in attendance. He opened the door of the antiquated vehicle. The princess, assisted by the duke, quickly entered it, but as that gentleman offered his hand to the young widow for the same purpose, the petulant beauty paused with the tip of her white satin slipper lightly poised on the carriage step, and said, with an air of the deepest apprehension :

“ Do examine every nook and corner of the carriage carefully, aunt, I beseech you, before I get in.”

“ But why, my dear ? ” inquired the princess, naïvely. “ What is the necessity of this precaution ? ”

“ I am afraid some red-headed girl or some stout shopkeeper may have been left in a corner, as it is in vehicles of this description that worthy shopkeepers drive about all day with their families when they treat themselves to an outing.”

Laughing heartily, the young widow sprang into the carriage. As she seated herself, the princess said to her, in a low tone, but with a deeply pained air :

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“Really, Fedora, I do not understand you. You are strangely sarcastic toward M. de Riancourt. What can be your object?”

“I want to cure him of his shameful stinginess. How could I better manifest my interest in him?”

Just then the duke took the seat opposite them. He seemed to endure with Christian meekness the ridicule of this young woman who possessed such magnificent diamonds, as well as all sorts of gold and silver mines; but the furtive glance he bestowed on her now and then, and a certain contraction of his thin lips, indicated that a sullen rage was rankling in his heart.

The footman having asked for orders, M. de Riancourt replied :

“To the Hôtel Saint-Ramon.”

“Pardon me, M. le duc,” answered the footman, “but I don’t know where the Hôtel Saint-Ramon is.”

“At the end of the Cours la Reine,” responded M. de Riancourt.

“Does M. le duc mean that large house on which they have been working several years?”

“Yes.”

The footman closed the door, and repeated the instructions to the coachman who applied the whip vigorously to his bony steeds, and the landau started in the direction of the Cours la Reine.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE HOTEL SAINT-RAMON.

M. DE RIANCOURT's clumsy equipage moved so slowly that when it reached the entrance to the Cours la Reine a pedestrian, who was proceeding in the same direction, kept pace with it without the slightest difficulty.

This pedestrian, who was very poorly dressed, did not seem to be very active, for he leaned heavily on his cane. His long beard, his hair, and his bushy eyebrows were as white as snow, while the swarthy hue of his wrinkled face gave him the appearance of an aged mulatto. When M. de Riancourt's carriage had advanced about half way up the Cours la Reine, its progress was still further impeded by a long line of vehicles, which were evidently also on the way to the Hôtel Saint-Ramon ; so the old man passed the landau, and walked on until he came to an avenue glittering with gaily coloured lamps, and filled from end to end with a long procession of carriages.

Though the old man seemed deeply absorbed in thought, his attention was naturally attracted to the large crowd that had assembled near the handsome gateway that served as an entrance to this brilliantly lighted avenue, so he paused, and, addressing one of the bystanders, inquired :

“ Can you tell me what all these people are looking at ? ”

“ They are looking at the guests who are going to the opening of the famous Saint-Ramon mansion.”

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“ Saint-Ramon ?” murmured the old man, with evident surprise. “ How strange !”

Then he added aloud :

“ What is this Hôtel Saint-Ramon, monsieur ?”

“ The eighth wonder of the world, people say. It has taken five years to build it, and the owner gives a house-warming to-night.”

“ To whom does this house belong, monsieur ?”

“ To a young man worth several millions.”

“ And what is his name ?”

“ Saint-Harem, or Saint-Herem, I believe.”

“ I thought as much,” the old man said to himself. “ But, in that case, why do they call it the Saint-Ramon mansion ?” Then, turning to the same bystander again, he asked aloud : “ Will you be kind enough to tell me what time it is ?”

“ Half-past ten, exactly.”

“ Thank you, monsieur,” responded the old man, getting a little nearer to the gate. “ Half-past ten,” he said to himself. “ I need not be at Chaillot until midnight, so I have plenty of time to solve this mystery.”

After a moment’s hesitation, the old man passed through the gateway, and proceeded up a walk shaded with magnificent elms, to a brilliantly lighted half-circle in front of the house itself, which was a veritable palace,—a superb example of the palmiest days of Renaissance architecture.

Crossing the half-circle, the old man found himself at the foot of the imposing perron leading to the peristyle. Through the glass doors that enclosed the entire front of this peristyle, he saw a long row of tall, powdered footmen clad in gorgeous liveries, but all the while the carriages that drew up at the foot of the perron were depositing men, women, and young girls, whose plain attire contrasted strangely with the splendour of this fairy palace.

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The old man, to whom allusion has already been made, urged on, apparently, by an almost irresistible curiosity, followed several of these newcomers up under the peristyle, where two tall Swiss, halberds in hand, opened the broad portals of the large glass double door to all, making their halberds ring noisily on the marble floor as each guest entered. Still mingling with a party of invited guests, the old man passed through a double row of footmen in bright blue livery, profusely trimmed with silver, into a large reception-room, where numerous valets, clad in bright blue jackets, black satin knee breeches, and white silk stockings, were in attendance, all manifesting the utmost deference to these guests whose unpretending appearance seemed so out of harmony with the princely luxury of the abode. The guests passed from this room into a large music-room, fitted up for concerts, and from that into an immense circular hall surmounted by a dome. This hall served as a nucleus for three other large apartments,—or rather four in all, including the music-room,—one intended for a ballroom, another for a banquet-hall and the other for a cardroom.

It is impossible to describe the splendour, elegance, and sumptuous furnishings of these large, brilliantly lighted apartments, whose lavish adornments in the shape of paintings, statuary, and flowers were multiplied again and again in the enormous mirrors that lined the walls. The most illustrious artists of the time had assisted in this work of ornamentation. Masterpieces by Ingres and Delacroix hung side by side with those of Scheffer and Paul Delaroche; while the future fame of Couture and Gérôme had evidently been divined by the wealthy and discerning builder of this palace. Among the most magnificent works of art, we must not forget to mention an immense sideboard in the banquet-hall, loaded with superb silver, worthy of the master hand of Benvenuto Cellini, and consisting of candelabra.

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pitchers, epergnes, and fruit-dishes, each and every one entitled to an honoured place in a museum, by reason of its rare beauty of form and exquisite ornamentation.

One word more in relation to a peculiar feature of the spacious rotunda. Directly over a gigantic white marble mantel, a monument to the genius of David of Angers, the French Michael Angelo, with allegorical figures in *alto-reliévo*, representing the Arts and Sciences at the base, was a portrait that might with reason have been attributed to Velasquez. It represented a pale, austere-looking man with strongly marked features, hollow cheeks, and sunken eyes. A brown robe similar to those worn by monks imparted to this person the impressive character of those portraits of saints or martyrs so frequently encountered in the Spanish school of art,—a resemblance that was heightened by a sort of halo which shone out brightly against the dark background of the picture, and seemed to cast a reflected radiance upon the austere and thoughtful countenance. On the frame below, in German text, were the words :

SAINT - RAMON.

The aged stranger, who had continued to advance with the crowd, at last found himself opposite this fireplace, but, on seeing the portrait, he paused as if overwhelmed with astonishment. His emotion was so great that tears rose to his eyes, and he murmured, almost unconsciously :

“ My poor friend, it is indeed he! But why has the word ‘ saint ’ been added to his name? Why has this aureole been placed around his head? And this strange entertainment, how is it that a person as poorly clad as I am, and a stranger to the master of the house, besides, should be allowed to enter here unhindered ? ”

Just then a servant, carrying a large waiter loaded with ices, cake, and similar dainties, paused in front of

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the old man, and offered him refreshments. This offer was declined, however, by the stranger, who was striving, though in vain, to determine the social status of those around him. The men, who were for the most part plainly but neatly dressed, some in coats and others in new blouses, while they seemed delighted to participate in the fête, appeared perfectly at ease, or, in other words, perfectly at home, and not in the least astonished at the wonders of this palatial abode ; while the women and the young girls, many of whom, by the way, were extremely pretty, were evidently much more deeply impressed by the splendour around them. The young girls, particularly, who were nearly all attired in inexpensive, though perfectly fresh, white dresses, exchanged many admiring comments in low tones.

The venerable stranger, more and more anxious to solve this mystery, at last approached a group composed of several men and women who had paused in front of the fireplace to gaze at the portrait of Saint-Ramon.

“ You see that picture, Juliette,” he heard a sturdy, pleasant-faced young man say to his wife. “ It is only right to call that worthy man Saint-Ramon. There is many a saint in paradise who is not to be compared with him, judging from the good he has done.”

“ How is that, Michel ?”

“ Why, thanks to this worthy saint, I, like most of my fellow workmen here, have had lucrative employment for the last five years, and we all owe this good fortune to the original of this portrait, M. Saint-Ramon. Thanks to him, I have not been out of work for a single day, and my wages have not only been liberal enough to support us comfortably, but also to enable us to lay aside a snug little sum for a rainy day.”

“ But it was not this worthy man whose portrait we see here that ordered and paid for all this work. It was M. de Saint-Herem, who is always so pleasant and

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kind, and who said so many nice things to us just now when we came in."

"Of course, my dear Juliette, it was M. de Saint-Herem who employed us, but, as he always said to us when he came to see how we were getting on: 'Ah, boys, if it were not for the wealth I inherited from another person, I could not give you employment or pay you as such industrious and capable workmen ought to be paid, so always hold in grateful remembrance the memory of the person who left me all this money. He accumulated it, penny by penny, by depriving himself of every comfort, while I have the pleasure of spending his wealth. In fact, it is my bounden duty to spend it. What is the good of money, if it is not to be spent? So hold in grateful remembrance, I say, the memory of yonder good old miser. Bless his avarice, for it gives me the pleasure of accomplishing wonderful things, and you, liberal wages, richly earned.'"

"Still, while we are, of course, under great obligations to this worthy miser, we ought to be equally grateful to M. de Saint-Herem, it seems to me. So many wealthy people spend little or nothing; or, if they do employ us, haggle about the price of our work, or keep us waiting a long time for our money."

The venerable stranger listened to this conversation with quite as much interest as astonishment. He also lent an attentive ear to other conversations that were going on around him, and everywhere he heard a chorus of praises and benedictions lavished upon Saint-Ramon, while M. de Saint-Herem's nobility of soul and liberality were lauded to the skies.

"Is all this a dream?" the old man said to himself. "Who would ever believe that these eulogiums and protestations of respect were addressed to the memory of a miser,—of a person belonging to a class of people that is almost universally despised and vilified? And it is the spendthrift heir of this miser who thus eulogises

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him! But what strange whim led him to invite all his workmen to his entertainment?"

The astonishment of the old man increased as he began to note a strange contrast that was becoming apparent between the guests, for quite a number of correctly dressed and extremely distinguished-looking men — many with decorations in their buttonholes — were now moving about the spacious rooms with exquisitely dressed ladies on their arms.

Florestan de Saint-Herem, handsomer, gayer, and more brilliant than ever, seemed to be entirely in his element in this atmosphere of luxury and splendour. He did the honours of his palace delightfully, receiving every guest with wonderful grace and perfect courtesy. He had stationed himself near the door of the large circular hall into which the reception-room opened, and no woman or young girl entered to whom he did not address a few of those cordial and affable words which, when they are sincere, never fail to charm even the most timid, and make them perfectly at ease.

Florestan was thus engaged when he saw the Comtesse Zomaloff, accompanied by the Princesse Wileska and the Duc de Riancourt, enter the hall.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A NOVEL ENTERTAINMENT.

SAIN^T-HEREM had never seen the Comtesse Zomaloff and her aunt before, but he had known M. de Riancourt a long time, so on seeing him enter, accompanied by two ladies, Florestan stepped quickly forward to meet him.

"My dear Saint-Herem," said the duke, "permit me to introduce to you Madame la Princesse Wileska and Madame la Comtesse Zomaloff. These ladies hope they have not been indiscreet in accompanying me here this evening to see your new house and its wonders."

"I am delighted to have the honour of receiving the ladies, and shall be only too glad to show them what you are pleased to call the wonders of my house."

"And M. de Riancourt is right, for, on entering here, I must confess that it is difficult to decide what one should admire most, everything is so beautiful," remarked the countess.

"I also feel it my duty to tell you, my dear Saint-Herem, that Madame Zomaloff's visit is not altogether one of curiosity," remarked the duke, "for I have told the countess of your intentions in regard to the house, and as I shall be so fortunate as to have the honour of bestowing my name on the countess a week from now, you understand, of course, that I can come to no decision in this matter without consulting her."

"Really, madame, as M. de Riancourt thus gives himself all the airs of a married man in advance, don't you think it only fair that he should submit to the conse-

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quences of his revelation ? ” exclaimed Florestan, gaily, turning to Madame Zomaloff. “ So, as a husband never gives his arm to his wife, will you not do me the honour to accept mine ? ”

In this way Florestan escaped the necessity of offering his arm to the princess, who seemed likely to prove a much less agreeable companion than her young and pretty niece, who graciously accepted her host’s proffered arm, while M. de Rianceourt, as in duty bound, offered his arm to the princess.

“ I have travelled a great deal, monsieur,” said Madame Zomaloff, “ but I have never seen anything to compare, not with the magnificence, for any millionaire could compass that,—but with the exquisite taste which has presided over every detail in the construction of this mansion. It is really a superb museum. You will pardon me, I trust, but I really cannot refrain from expressing the admiration the superb decoration of this ceiling excites.”

“ The artist’s reward should follow admiration for his work, do you not think so, madame ? ” inquired Florestan, smiling. “ So it depends upon you to make the artist who painted that ceiling both proud and happy.”

And as he spoke Saint-Herem pointed out to Madame Zomaloff one of the most illustrious masters of the modern school of art.

“ I thank you a thousand times, monsieur, for this piece of good fortune ! ” exclaimed the young woman, advancing with Florestan toward the artist.

“ My friend,” Saint-Herem said to him, “ Madame la Comtesse Zomaloff wishes to express to you her intense admiration for your work.”

“ Not only my admiration, but my gratitude as well,” added the lady, graciously. “ The profound pleasure the sight of such a *chef-d’œuvre* excites certainly places the beholder under a deep obligation to the creator of it.”

“ However pleasing and flattering such praise may be

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to me, I can take only a part of it to myself," replied the illustrious painter, with great modesty and good taste. "But leaving my own works out of the question entirely, so I may be able to express myself more freely, let me advise you to notice particularly the decorations of the ceiling of the music-room. They are the work of M. Ingres, our Raphael, and will furnish pilgrims of art in days to come with as many objects of adoration as the finest frescoes of Rome, Pisa, or Florence, yet this *chef-d'œuvre* would not be in existence but for my friend Saint-Herem. Really, madame, in this extravagant but essentially materialistic age, is it not a delightful phenomenon to meet a Medici, as in the palmy days of the Italian republics ?"

"That is true, monsieur," replied the countess, quickly, "and history has been only just in—"

"Pardon me for interrupting you, madame la comtesse," said Saint-Herem, smiling, "but I am no less modest than my famous friend here, so for fear that your enthusiasm may lead you astray, I must point out the real Medici to you. There he is," added Florestan, pointing to the portrait of Saint-Ramon, as he spoke.

"What an austere face!" exclaimed the countess, scrutinising the portrait with mingled surprise and curiosity; then seeing the name inscribed upon the frame, she asked, turning to Florestan in evident astonishment, "Saint-Ramon? What saint is that?"

"A saint of my own making, madame. He was my uncle, and, though I am not a pope, I have ventured to canonise this admirable man as a reward for his long martyrdom and for the miracles he has wrought since his death."

"His long martyrdom! The miracles he wrought after his death!" Madame Zomaloff repeated, wonderingly. "You are jesting, monsieur, are you not?"

"Far from it, madame. My uncle imposed the severest privations upon himself during his life, for he

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was a confirmed miser. That was his martyrdom. I inherited his wealth; so the artistic achievements you so much admire really owe their origin indirectly to him. These are the miracles to which I alluded."

Madame Zomaloff, more and more impressed by Saint-Herem's originality, was silent for a moment, but M. de Riancourt, who had been standing a little distance off, now approached Florestan, and said :

"There is a question I have been wanting to ask you ever since our arrival, my dear Saint-Herem. Who are these people? I have recognised three or four great painters and a celebrated architect among them, but who are the others? The princess and I have been trying in vain to solve the mystery."

"As M. Riancourt has ventured to ask this rather indiscreet question, I must confess that I share his curiosity, monsieur," added Madame Zomaloff.

"You have doubtless noticed, madame, that most of the persons I have taken such pleasure in welcoming this evening do not belong to the fashionable world."

"That is true."

"Still, you were much pleased just now, were you not, madame, to meet the great artist whose work you so greatly admired?"

"Yes, monsieur; I told you how much pleasure the opportunity to meet him afforded me."

"You must consequently approve, I think, of my having extended an invitation to him as well as to a number of his colleagues."

"It seems to me that such an invitation was almost obligatory upon you, monsieur."

"Ah, well, madame, I feel that it was likewise obligatory upon me to extend the same invitation to all who had assisted in any way in the construction of this house, from the famous artists to the humblest mechanic, so they are all here with their families enjoying the beau-

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ties they have created, as they, in my opinion, at least, have an undoubted right to do."

"What!" exclaimed M. de Riancourt, "do you mean to say that you have the carvers, and gilders, and locksmiths, and carpenters, and paper-hangers, and even the masons, here? Why, this passes my comprehension."

"Do you know anything about the habits of bees, my dear duke?"

"Not much, I must admit."

"You might consider their habits exceedingly reprehensible, my dear duke, inasmuch as the insolent creatures insist upon occupying the cells they themselves have constructed; and, what is worse, they even assert their claim to the delicious honey they have accumulated with so much skill and labour for their winter's need."

"And what conclusion do you draw from all this?"

"That we drones should give the poor and industrious human bees the innocent satisfaction of enjoying, at least for a day, the gilded cells they have constructed for us,—for us who subsist upon the honey gathered by others."

Madame Zomaloff had dropped Florestan's arm a few moments before. She now took it again, and walking on a few steps, so as to leave her aunt and the duke a little way behind her, she said to Saint-Herem, with deep earnestness:

"Your idea is charming, monsieur, and I do not wonder at the expression of contentment I notice on the faces of your guests. Yes, the more I think of it, the more just and generous the idea seems to me. After all, as you say, this superb mansion represents the combined labour of artisans of every degree, high and low; hence, in your eyes, this house must be much more than a marvel of good taste and luxury, as the associations connected with its construction will always be unspeakably precious to you. That being the case—".

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"Go on, madame."

"I cannot understand how—"

"You hesitate, madame. Speak, I beg of you."

"M. de Riancourt has informed you of our intended marriage, monsieur," said Madame Zomaloff, with some embarrassment, after a moment's silence. "A couple of days ago, while talking with him about the difficulty of securing as large and handsomely appointed house as I desired, M. de Riancourt happened to remember that some one had told him that you might be willing to dispose of the house you had just completed."

"Yes, madame, M. de Riancourt wrote, asking to be allowed to go through the house, and I advised him to wait until this evening, as I intended to give an entertainment, and he would consequently be much better able to judge of the arrangement and appearance of the reception-rooms, but I did not expect to have the honour of receiving you, madame."

"I have ventured to ask you several questions already, monsieur," remarked the young woman, with marked hesitation, "and I am going to hazard one more. How, monsieur, can you have the courage or the ingratitude to think of abandoning this home which you have created with so much interest and love, this home with which so many kind and generous memories are already associated?"

"Good Heavens! madame," replied Saint-Herem, with the most cheerful air imaginable, "I am going to sell the house because I am ruined, utterly ruined! This is my last day as a man of wealth, and you must admit, madame, that, thanks to your presence here, the day could not have a happier or more brilliant ending."

CHAPTER XIX.

A CHANGE OF OWNERS.

FLORESTAN DE SAINT-HEREM had uttered the words, “I am ruined, utterly ruined,” with such unruffled good-humour and cheerfulness that Madame Zomaloff stared at him in amazement, unable to believe her ears; so after a moment, she exclaimed :

“ What, monsieur, you are — ”

“ Ruined, madame, utterly ruined. Five years ago my sainted uncle left me a fortune of nearly or quite five millions. I have spent that and nearly eighteen hundred thousand francs more, but the sale of this house and its contents will pay what I owe and leave me about one hundred thousand francs, upon which I can live in comfort in some quiet retreat. I shall turn shepherd, perhaps. That existence would be such a charming contrast to my past life, when impossibilities and marvellous dreams were changed into realities for me and my friends by the vast wealth of which I had so unexpectedly become the possessor, and when all that was beautiful, elegant, sumptuous, and rare was blended in my dazzling career. Would you believe it, madame, I was famed for my liberality through all Europe? Europe? Why! did not a Chandernagor lapidary send me a sabre, the handle of which was encrusted with precious stones, with the following note: ‘ This scimitar belonged to Tippoo-Sahib; it ought now to belong to M. de Saint-Herem. The price is twenty-five thousand francs, payable at the house of the Rothschilds in Paris.’

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Yes, madame, the rarest and most costly objects of art were sent to me from every part of the world. The finest English horses were in my stables ; the most costly wines filled my cellar ; the finest cooks quarrelled for the honour of serving me, and the famous Doctor Gasterini — you know him, madame, do you not ? ”

“ Who has not heard of the greatest gourmand in the known world ? ”

“ Ah, well, madame, that famous man declared he dined quite as well at my table as at his own — and he did not speak in equally flattering terms of M. de Talleyrand’s cuisine, I assure you. Believe me, madame, I have the consoling consciousness of having spent my fortune generously, nobly, and discriminately. I have no cause to reproach myself for a single foolish outlay or unworthy act. It is with a mind filled with delightful memories and a heart full of serenity that I see my wealth take flight.”

Saint-Herem’s tone was so earnest, the sincerity of his sentiments and his words were so legibly imprinted upon his frank and handsome face, that Madame Zomalloff, convinced of the truth of what he said, replied :

“ Really, monsieur, such a philosophical way of viewing the subject amazes me. To think of renouncing a life like that you have been leading without one word of bitterness ! ”

“ Bitterness ! when I have known so many joys. That would be ungrateful, indeed ! ”

“ And you can leave this enchanted palace without one sigh of regret, and that, too, just as you were about to enjoy it ? ”

“ I did not know that the hour of my ruin was so close at hand until my rascally steward showed me the state of my bank account hardly a week ago, so you see I have lost no time. Besides, in leaving this palace which I have taken so much pleasure in creating, I am like a poet who has written the last verse of his poem,

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like the artist who has just given the last touch to his picture, after which they have the imperishable glory of having achieved a masterpiece to console them. In my case, madame,—excuse my artistic vanity,—this temple of luxury, art, and pleasure will be a noble monument; so how ungrateful I should be to complain of my lot! And you, madame, will reign here as the divinity of this temple, for you will purchase the house, I am sure. It would suit you so well. Do not let the opportunity to secure it pass. M. de Riancourt may or may not have told you, but he knows that Lord Wilmot has made me a handsome offer for it. I should be so sorry to be obliged to sell to him, for he is so ugly, and so is his wife and his five daughters as well. Think what presiding spirits they would be for this splendid temple, which seems somehow to have been built expressly for you. I have one favour to ask, though, madame. That large painting of my uncle is a fine work of art, and though the name and face of Saint-Ramon appear several times in the medallions that adorn the façade, it would be a pleasure to me to think that this worthy uncle of mine would gaze down for ages to come upon the pleasures which he denied himself all his life!"

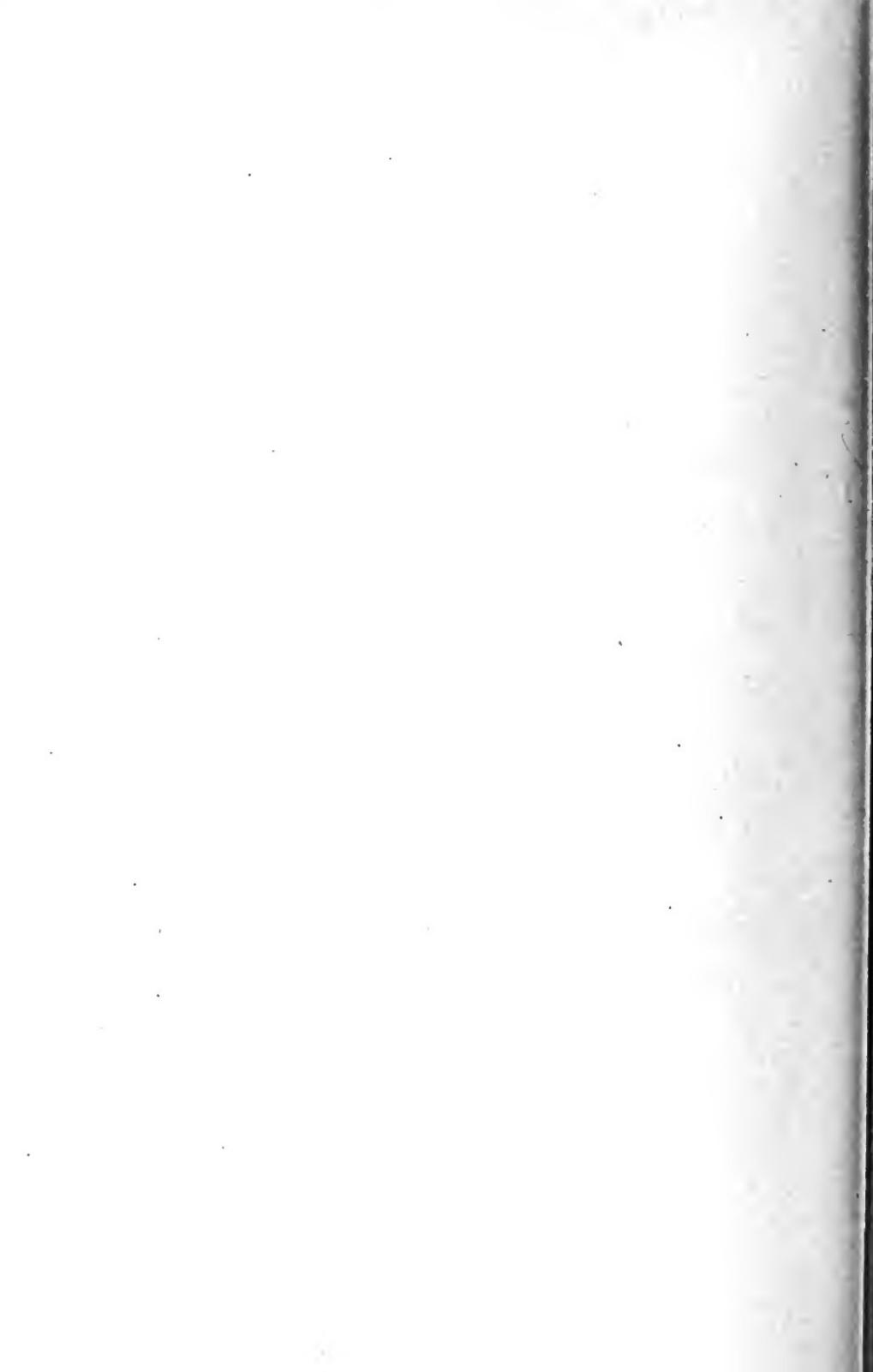
The conversation between the countess and Saint-Herem was here interrupted by M. de Riancourt. The party had been making a tour of the reception apartments as they talked, and the duke now said to Florestan:

"The house is superb, and everything is in perfect taste, but eighteen hundred thousand francs is entirely too much to ask for it, even including furniture and silver."

"I have no personal interest in the matter, I assure you, my dear duke," replied Florestan, smiling. "The eighteen hundred thousand francs will all go to my creditors, so I must needs be unpleasantly tenacious in •



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regard to price; besides, Lord Wilmot offers me that amount, and is urging me to accept it."

"But you will certainly make concessions to me that you would not make to Lord Wilmot, my dear fellow. Come, Saint-Herem, don't be obdurate. Make a reasonable reduction—"

"M. de Saint-Herem," hastily interposed the countess, "the duke must permit me to interfere with his negotiations, for I will take the house at the price you have mentioned. I give you my word, and I ask yours in return."

"Thank Heaven, madame, my star has not deserted me," said Florestan, cordially offering his hand to Madame Zomaloff. "The matter is settled."

"But, madame!" exclaimed M. de Riancourt, greatly surprised and not a little annoyed at this display of impulsiveness on the part of his future wife,— for he had hoped to secure a reduction in price from Saint-Herem,— "really, this is a very important matter, and you ought not to commit yourself in this way without consulting me."

"You have my word, M. de Saint-Herem," said Madame Zomaloff, again interrupting the duke. "This purchase of mine is a purely personal matter. If convenient to you, my agent will confer with yours tomorrow."

"Very well, madame," replied Saint-Herem. Then, turning to M. de Riancourt, he added, gaily, "You are not offended, I hope, monsieur. It is all your own fault, though. You should have played the grand seigneur, not haggled like a shopkeeper."

Just at that moment the orchestra, which had not been playing for nearly a quarter of an hour, gave the signal for the dancing to begin.

"Pardon me for leaving you, countess," remarked Saint-Herem, again turning to Madame Zomaloff, "but I have invited a young girl to dance this set with me,—

a very pretty girl, the daughter of one of the head carpenters who built my house, or, rather, your house, madame. It is pleasant to take this thought, at least, away with me on leaving you."

And bowing respectfully to Madame Zomaloff, their host went in search of the charming young girl he had engaged as a partner, and the ball began.

"My dear Fedora," said the princess, who had watched her niece's long conversation with Saint-Herem with no little annoyance, "it is getting late, and we promised our friend that we would be at her house early."

"You must permit me to say that I think you have acted much too hastily in this matter," said the duke to his fiancée. "Saint-Herem has got to sell this house to pay his debts, and, with a little perseverance, we could have induced him to take at least fifty thousand francs less, particularly if *you* had insisted upon it. It is always so hard to refuse a pretty woman anything," added M. de Riancourt, with his most insinuating smile.

"What are you thinking of, my dear Fedora?" asked the princess, touching the young woman lightly on the arm, for her niece, who was standing with one elbow resting on a gilded console loaded with flowers, seemed to have relapsed into a profound reverie, and evidently had not heard a single word that her aunt and the duke had said to her. "Why don't you answer? What is the matter with you?"

"I hardly know. I feel very strangely," replied the countess, dreamily.

"You need air, probably, my dear countess," said M. de Riancourt. "I am not at all surprised. Though the apartments are very large, this plebeian crowd renders the atmosphere suffocating, and—"

"Are you ill, Fedora?" asked the princess, with increasing uneasiness.

"Not in the least. On the contrary, the emotion I

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experience is full of sweetness and charm, so, my dear aunt, I scarcely know how to express —”

“ Possibly it is the powerful odour of these flowers that affects you so peculiarly,” suggested M. de Riancourt.

“ No, it is not that. I hesitate to tell you and my aunt; you will think it so strange and absurd.”

“ Explain, Fedora, I beg of you.”

“ I will, but you will be greatly surprised,” responded the young widow with a half-confidential, half-coquettish air. Then, turning to M. de Riancourt, she said, in an undertone :

“ It seems to me — ”

“ Well, my dear countess ? ”

“ That — ”

“ Go on. I beg of you.”

“ That I am dying to marry M. de Saint-Herem.”

“ Madame ! ” exclaimed the astonished duke, turning crimson with anger. “ Madame ! ”

“ What is the matter, my dear duke ? ” asked the princess quickly.

“ Madame la comtesse,” said the duke, forcing a smile, “ your jest is — is rather unseemly, to say the least, and — ”

“ Give me your arm, my dear duke,” said Madame Zomaloff, with the most natural air imaginable, “ for it is late. We ought to have been at the embassy some time ago. It is all your fault, too. How is it that you, who are punctuality personified, did not strike the hour of eleven long ago.”

“ Ah, madame, I am in no mood for laughing,” exclaimed the duke, in his most sentimental tones. “ How your cruel jest pained me just now ! It almost broke my heart.”

“ I had no idea your heart was so vulnerable, my poor friend.”

“ Ah, madame, you are very unjust, when I would gladly give my life for you.”

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“Would you, really? Ah, well, I shall ask no such heroic sacrifice as that on your part, my dear duke.”

A few minutes afterward, Madame Zomaloff, her aunt, and the duke left the Hôtel Saint-Ramon.

Almost at the same instant the stranger who looked so much like an aged mulatto left the palatial dwelling, bewildered by what he had just seen and heard. The clock in a neighbouring church was striking the hour as he descended the steps.

“Half-past eleven!” the old man murmured. “I have plenty of time to reach Chaillot before midnight. Ah, what other strange things am I about to hear?”

CHAPTER XX.

THE RETURN.

THE old man climbed the hill leading to the Rue de Chaillot, and soon reached the church of that poor and densely populated faubourg.

Contrary to custom at that hour, the church was lighted. Through the open door the brilliantly illuminated nave and altar could be plainly seen. Though the edifice was still empty, some solemn ceremony was evidently about to take place, for though midnight was close at hand, there were lights in many of the neighbouring houses, and several groups had assembled on the pavement in front of the church. Approaching one of these groups, the old man listened attentively, and heard the following conversation :

“They will be here soon, now.”

“Yes, for it is almost midnight.”

“It is a strange hour to be married, isn’t it ?”

“Yes, but when one gets a dowry, one needn’t be too particular about the hour.”

“Who is to be married at this hour, gentlemen ?” inquired the old man.

“It is very evident that you don’t live in this neighbourhood, my friend.”

“No. I am a stranger here.”

“If you were not, you would know that it was the night for those six marriages that have taken place here on the night of the twelfth of May, for the last four years. On the night of the twelfth of May, every year,

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six poor young girls are married in this church, and each girl receives a dowry of ten thousand francs."

"From whom?"

"From a worthy man who died five years ago. He left a handsome fund for this purpose, and his name is consequently wonderfully popular in Chaillot."

"And what is the name of the worthy man who dowered these young girls so generously?" inquired the stranger, with a slight tremor in his voice.

"They call him Father Richard, monsieur. He has a son, a very fine young man, who carries out his father's last wishes religiously. And a nobler man than M. Louis never lived. Everybody knows that he and his wife and child live on three or four thousand francs a year, and yet they must have inherited a big fortune from Father Richard, to be able to give six young girls a dowry of ten thousand francs apiece every year, to say nothing of the expenses of the school and of Father Richard's Home."

"Pardon a stranger's curiosity, monsieur, but you speak of a school."

"Yes, Father Richard's School. Madame Mariette has charge of it."

"Madame Mariette, who is she?"

"M. Louis Richard's wife. The school was founded for twenty-five little boys and as many little girls, who remain there until they are twelve years old, and are then apprenticed to carefully chosen persons. The children are well clothed and fed, and each child receives ten sous a day besides, to encourage them to save their money."

"And you say it is M. Louis Richard's wife who has charge of this school?"

"Yes, monsieur, and she says she takes so much interest in it because before her marriage she was a poor working girl who could neither read nor write, and that she herself suffered so cruelly from a lack of educa-

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tion, that she is glad to be able to prevent others from suffering what she suffered."

"But the home — You also spoke of a home, I believe."

"That was founded for working women who are ill, or no longer able to work. Madame Lacombe has charge of that."

"And who is Madame Lacombe?"

"Madame Mariette's godmother, a good woman who has lost one arm. She is kindness and patience personified to the poor women under her charge, and it is not at all to be wondered at, for she too knows what it is to be poor and infirm; for, as she tells everybody, before her goddaughter married M. Louis they often went hungry for days at a time. But here comes the bridal party. Step in here beside me so you can see them better."

Louis Richard, with Madame Lacombe on his arm, walked at the head of the little procession; then came Mariette, holding a handsome little four-year-old boy by the hand.

No one would have recognised Madame Lacombe. Her once pallid and wrinkled face was plump and rosy, and characterised by an expression of perfect content. She wore a lace bonnet, and a handsome shawl partially concealed her silk gown.

Louis Richard's countenance wore a look of quiet happiness. It was evident that he realised the great responsibility that devolved upon him. Mariette, who was prettier than ever, had that air of gentle dignity that suits young mothers so well. In spite of her marriage, she still clung to the simple garb of her girlhood. Faithful to the coquettish little cap of the grisette, she had never worn a bonnet, and she was quite irresistible in her freshness, grace, and beauty, under her snowy cap with its bows of sky-blue ribbon.

After Louis, his wife and child, and Mother Lacombe, came, dressed in white and crowned with orange blossoms,

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the six young girls who were to receive dowries that year, attended by the parents or the witnesses of their betrothed husbands, then the six bridegrooms escorting the relatives or witnesses of their affianced wives, all evidently belonging to the labouring class. Following them came the twenty-four couples that had been married during the four preceding years, then the children of Father Richard's School, and, finally, such inmates of the home as were able to attend the ceremony.

It took nearly a quarter of an hour for the procession to pass into the church, and the aged stranger watched it sadly and thoughtfully while such comments as the following were exchanged around him :

“ It is all due to Father Richard that these good, industrious girls can become happy wives.”

“ Yes, and how happy the married couples look ! ”

“ And they owe it all to Father Richard, too.”

“ And to M. Louis, who carries out his father's wishes so faithfully.”

“ Yes ; but if it were not for the large fortune Father Richard left him, M. Louis would not have been able to do any of these things.”

“ And the schoolchildren. Did you notice how plump and rosy and contented they looked,— the boys in their comfortable woollen jackets, and the girls in their warm merino dresses.”

“ Think of it, there were nearly one hundred and fifty persons in the procession, and every one of them has shared Father Richard's benefits ! ”

“ That is true ; and when one remembers that this work has been going on for four years, it makes between six and seven hundred people who have been taught or supported or married through Father Richard's bounty.”

“ To say nothing of the fact that, if M. Louis lives thirty years longer, there will be five or six thousand persons who will owe their happy, respectable lives

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to Father Richard — for poverty causes the ruin of so many poor creatures!"

"Five or six thousand persons, you say; why, there will be many more than that."

"How do you make that out?"

"Why, there will be children in each of these households. These children will share the advantages that have been bestowed upon their parents. They will consequently be well brought up and receive a fair education. Later in life they will receive their share of the small fortune their thrifty and industrious parents are almost certain to accumulate, for it is an easy matter to save when one has something to start with."

"True; and calculating in this way, the number of persons benefited is increased at least three-fold; while if one thinks of the second and third generations, the good this worthy man has accomplished becomes incalculable."

"And yet it is so easy to do good, and there are so many persons who have more money than they know what to do with. But what is the matter with you, my friend?" exclaimed the speaker. "What the devil are you crying about?" he added, seeing that the stranger beside him was sobbing violently.

"What I have heard you say about Father Richard, and the sight of all these happy people, touches me so deeply —"

"Oh, if that is the cause of your tears, they do you honour, my friend. But as all this seems to interest you so much, let us go into the church and witness the ceremony. You can go to the home, too, afterward, if you choose; it is open to everybody to-night."

The crowd in the church was so great that the old man was unable to secure a place that commanded a view of the altar, but after a moment's reflection he seemed to become perfectly reconciled to the fact, and stationed himself by the holy-water font near the door.

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The ceremonies ended, a solemn silence pervaded the edifice, finally broken by the grave voice of the officiating priest, who addressed the newly wedded couples as follows :

“ And now that your unions have been consecrated by God, my young friends, persevere in the honest, industrious, and God-fearing life that has secured you this good fortune, and never forget that you owe this just reward of courage in adversity and of dignity in poverty to a man imbued with the tenderest affection for his brother man ; for, faithful to the spirit of a true Christian, he did not consider himself the master, but simply as the custodian and almoner of the wealth with which Heaven had blessed him. Does not Christ tell his followers to love one another, and bid those who are endowed with this world’s goods to give to those who have none ? The Saviour rewarded this good man by giving him a son worthy of him, and his obedience to the laws of Christian fraternity makes him deserve to have his name ever cherished and honoured among men. You, in your just gratitude for benefits conferred, owe him this remembrance, and Father Richard’s name should be for ever blessed by you, your children, and your children’s children.”

An approving murmur from the crowd greeted these words, and drowned the sobs of the aged stranger, who had dropped upon his knees, apparently completely overcome with emotion.

The noise the newly married couples made in leaving the altar aroused the old man, who hastily rose just in time to see Louis Richard advancing toward him with Madame Lacombe on his arm. The old man trembled in every limb, but as Louis was about to pass he hastily caught up a dipper of holy water and offered it to Mariette’s husband.

“ Thank you, my good father,” said Louis, kindly. Then noting the shabby clothing and white hair of the

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donor, and seeing a request for alms in the act, the young man slipped a shining gold piece in the extended hand, saying, almost affectionately :

“ Keep it and pray for Father Richard.”

The old man seized the coin greedily, and, raising it to his lips, kissed it again and again, while the tears streamed down his wrinkled cheeks.

Louis Richard did not notice this strange incident, however, for he had left the church, and, followed by the bridal party and a large number of the spectators, was on his way to the home, whither the aged stranger, leaning heavily on his cane, also followed him.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE AWAKENING.

THE home stood upon a high knoll in a location as pleasant as it was salubrious, and large shady grounds surrounded the spacious building.

The night was clear and still ; spring perfumes filled the air, and when the old man reached the spot he found the people ranged in a half-circle around the steps of the building, no room inside being large enough to hold the crowd.

Soon Louis Richard, according to his custom each year, came out upon the perron, and said :

" My friends, five years ago to-night I lost the best and kindest of fathers. He died a frightful death in that terrible catastrophe on the Versailles railway. My father, being the possessor of a handsome fortune, might have lived in luxury and idleness. On the contrary, he preferred to lead a frugal and industrious life, so while he denied himself all comforts, and earned his bread by his daily toil, his wealth slowly but surely increased day by day ; but when the day of his premature death came, I had to mourn one of the warmest friends of humanity, for nearly all his wealth was devoted to the accomplishment of three great and noble works : the amelioration of the condition,—

" First, Of poor children deprived of the advantages of an elementary education.

" Secondly, Of poor but honest and industrious young

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girls who are too often exposed to terrible temptation by reason of ill health, inadequate wages, and poverty.

“ And lastly, Of aged or infirm women who, after a long life of toil, are incapacitated for further labour.

“ True, the result accomplished each year is painfully small when one thinks of the ills of humanity, but he who does all the good he can, even if he only shares his crust with his starving brother, does his duty as nobly as the person who gives millions.

“ It is the duty of every right-minded man to make every possible effort to improve the condition of his fellow men ; but in this work I am acting only as my father’s agent, and the accomplishment of this glorious duty would fill my life with unbounded happiness if I were not obliged to mourn the loss of the most beloved of parents.”

Louis Richard had scarcely uttered these last words when quite a commotion became apparent in the crowd, for the aged stranger’s strength seemed suddenly to fail him, and he would have fallen to the ground had it not been for the friendly support of those near him.

On hearing the cause of the hubbub, Louis Richard hastened to the old man’s aid, and had him taken into the home in order that he might receive immediate attention, after which he requested the bridal parties to adjourn to the immense tent, where supper was to be served, and where Madame Lacombe and Mariette would do the honours in his absence.

The old man had been carried in an unconscious condition to Louis’s office, a room on the ground floor. His profound respect for his father’s memory had prevented him from parting with the furniture of the room he and his father had shared so long. The writing-desk, the old bureau, the antique chest, as well as the cheap painted bedstead, all had been kept, and it was on this same bed the unconscious man was laid.

As soon as he entered the room Louis despatched the

servant to a neighbouring drug store for some spirits, so he was left alone with the patient, whose features were almost entirely concealed by his long white hair and beard.

Louis took the old man's hand to feel his pulse, but as he did so the patient made a slight movement and uttered a few incoherent words.

The voice sounded strangely familiar to Louis, and he endeavoured to get a better look at the stranger's features, but the dim light that pervaded the room and the patient's long hair and beard rendered the attempt futile.

A moment more and Louis Richard's guest languidly raised his head and gazed around him. His eyes having fallen on the rather peculiarly shaped gray bedstead, he made a movement of surprise, but when he saw the old-fashioned chest, he exclaimed, excitedly :

“ Where am I ? My God, is this a dream ? ”

Again the voice struck Louis as being so familiar that he, too, gave a slight start, but almost immediately shaking his head and smiling bitterly, he muttered under his breath :

“ Alas ! regret often gives rise to strange illusions.” Then addressing the old man in affectionate tones, he asked :

“ How do you feel now, my good father ? ”

On hearing these words, the old man, seizing Louis's hand, covered it with tears and kisses before the latter could prevent it.

“ Come, come, my good father,” said Mariette's husband, surprised and touched, “ I have done nothing to deserve such gratitude on your part. I may be more fortunate some day, however. But tell me how you feel now. Was it weakness or overfatigue that caused your fainting fit ? ”

The old man made no reply, but pressed Louis's hand convulsively to his panting breast. The younger man,

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conscious of a strange and increasing emotion, felt the tears spring to his eyes.

“ Listen to me, my good father,” he began.

“ Oh, say that once more — just once more,” murmured the old man, hoarsely.

“ Ah, well, my good father — ”

But Louis did not finish the sentence, for his guest, unable to restrain himself any longer, raised himself up in bed, at the same time exclaiming, in a voice vibrating with tenderness :

“ Louis ! ”

That name, uttered with all the passion of a despairing soul, was a revelation.

The younger man turned as pale as death, started back, and stood as if petrified, with fixed, staring eyes.

The shock was too great, and several seconds elapsed before the thought, “ My father is not dead,” could penetrate his brain.

Does not the sudden transition from intense darkness into bright sunlight blind us for a time ?

But when the blissful truth dawned upon Louis’s mind, he threw himself on his knees by the old man’s bedside, and, putting back his long white locks with a feverish hand, studied his father’s features with eager, radiant eyes, until, convinced beyond a doubt, he could only murmur in a sort of ecstasy : “ My father, oh, God, my father ! ”

The scene that ensued between father and son beggars description ; but when the first transports of happiness had given place to a momentary calm, Father Richard said to his son :

“ I will tell you my story in a few words, my dear Louis. I have been asleep for five years, and woke only forty-eight hours ago.”

“ What do you mean ? ”

“ I was with poor Ramon and his daughter in one

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of the worst wrecked carriages. In some providential way my life was saved, though my right leg was broken, and fright deprived me of reason."

" You, father ? "

" Yes, I became insane with terror. I lost my reason completely. Removed from the scene of the catastrophe, my fractured limb was set in the home of a worthy physician, and after I recovered from that injury I was taken to an insane asylum near Versailles. My lunacy was of a harmless type. I talked only of my lost wealth. For nearly four years there was no change in my condition, but at the end of that time a slight improvement became apparent. This continued until my recovery became complete, though I was not allowed to leave the hospital until two days ago. It would be impossible to describe my feelings on my entire restoration to reason, when I woke as I told you from my long five years' sleep. My first thought, I blush to confess, was one of avarice. What had become of my property ? What use had you made of it ? When I was released from the hospital yesterday, the first thing I did was to hasten to my notary, your former employer, and my friend. You can imagine his astonishment. He told me that at first it was your intention to leave the property untouched, that is, except for a small stipend for your maintenance and that of your wife, until you attained the age of thirty-six ; but after a serious illness, thinking that death might overtake you before you had accomplished what you considered a sacred duty, you changed your mind, and came to consult him in regard to certain plans, to which he gave his unqualified approval. ' What were these plans ? ' I asked. ' Have the courage to wait until to-morrow night,' he replied ; ' then go to the church of Chaillot, and you will know all, and thank God for having given you such a son.' I did wait, my dear Louis. My long beard and my white hair changed me a great deal, but I stained my skin

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to disguise myself more completely, and to enable me to approach you without any danger of recognition. Oh, if you knew all I have seen and heard, my dear, noble child ! My name revered and blessed, thanks to your nobility of soul and the subterfuge prompted by your filial love ! Ah, what a revulsion of feeling this wrought in me. But, alas ! the illusion was of short duration. I had no hand whatever in the noble deeds attributed to me."

" How can you say that, father ? But for your self-denial and perseverance, how could I ever have done any good ? Did you not leave me the means of accomplishing it, an all-powerful lever ? My only merit consisted in having made a good use of the immense power bequeathed to me by you at the cost of so many privations on your part, and in realising the duties wealth imposed upon me. The terrible poverty and the lack of education from which my beloved wife had suffered so much, and the perils to which this poverty and lack of education had exposed her, her godmother's cruel suffering,— all had served to enlighten me as to the needs of the poor, and all three of us longed to do everything in our power to save others from the ills we had suffered. But after all, it is your work, not mine. I have reaped ; it was you who sowed."

The door suddenly opened, and Florestan Saint-Herem rushed in, and threw himself into his friend's arms with so much impetuosity that he did not even see Father Richard.

" Embrace me, Louis, rejoice with me !" he exclaimed. " You are my best friend, and you shall be the first to hear the news. I knew I should find you here, so I did not lose a minute in coming to tell you that Saint-Ramon has proved a saint indeed, for he has just worked the most wonderful of miracles."

" What do you mean ? "

" Why, two hours ago I was utterly ruined, but now

I am far richer than I ever have been. Think of it, Louis, gold mines and silver mines, and diamonds by the bushel,—fabulous wealth, in short, wealth amounting to dozens of millions. Oh, Saint-Ramon, Saint-Ramon, blessed be thy name for ever! I was right to canonise thee, for thou hast not proved ungrateful. thank Heaven!"

"For pity's sake, explain, Florestan."

"An hour ago, just as the entertainment I was giving to those honest workmen was drawing to a close, one of my servants came to inform me that a lady wished to see me in private. Who should it be but the Countess Zomaloff, a young and charming widow, who was to have married the Duc de Riancourt a week from now. Earlier in the evening she had come to look at my house, with a view to purchasing it. She had purchased it, in fact. Astonished to see her again, I stood perfectly silent for a moment. And what do you suppose she said to me, in the most natural tone imaginable?

"A thousand pardons for disturbing you, M. de Saint-Herem. I can say all I have to say in a couple of words. I am a widow. I am twenty-eight years old. I have no idea why I promised Riancourt that I would marry him, though very possibly I might have made this foolish marriage if I had not met you. You have a generous heart and a noble soul. The entertainment you gave this evening proves that. Your wit delights me, your character charms me, your goodness of heart touches me, and your personal appearance pleases me. So far as I, myself, am concerned, this step I am now taking should give you some idea of what kind of a person I am.

"This peculiar and unconventional procedure on my part, you will understand, I think. If your impression of me is favourable, I shall be both proud and happy to become Madame de Saint-Herem, and live in the Hôtel Saint-Ramon with you. I have a colossal fortune. It

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is at your disposal, for I trust my future to you, unreservedly, blindly. I shall await your decision anxiously. Good-evening.' And with these words the fairy disappeared, leaving me intoxicated with happiness at my good fortune."

"Florestan," said Louis, with a grave but affectionate air, "the confidence this young woman has shown in coming to you so frankly and confidingly throws a weighty responsibility upon you."

"I understand that," responded Saint-Herem, with undoubted sincerity. "I may have squandered the fortune that belonged to me, and ruined myself, but to squander a fortune that does not belong to me, and ruin a woman who trusts her future so unreservedly to me, would be infamous."

Madame Zomaloff married Florestan de Saint-Herem about one month after these events. Louis Richard, his father, and Mariette attended the wedding.

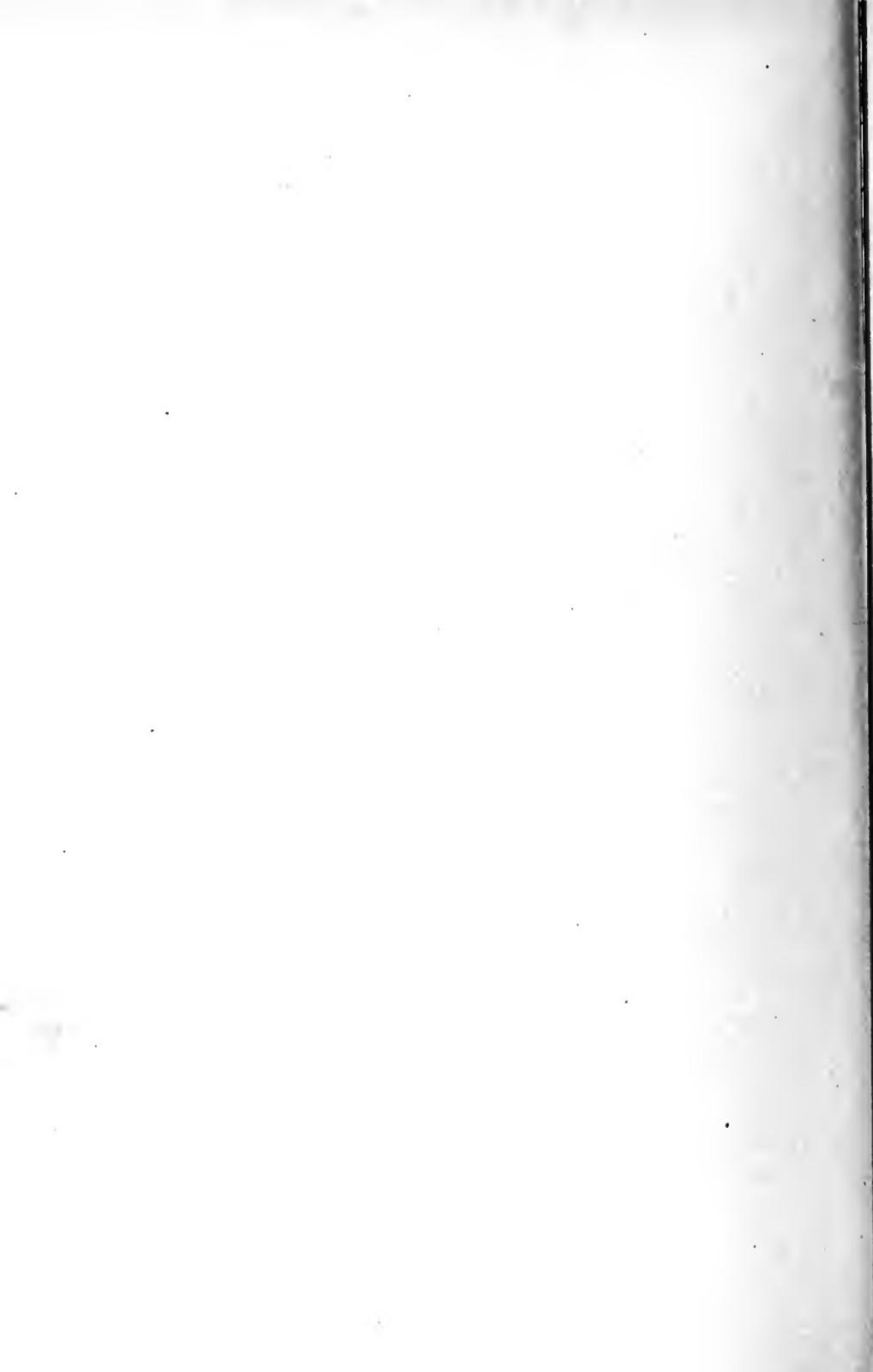
Father Richard, in spite of his resurrection, made no attempt to change the disposition Louis had made of his property up to the present time. The old man merely asked to be made steward of the home, and in that capacity he rendered very valuable assistance.

Every year, the twelfth of May is doubly celebrated.

Louis, his father, and Mariette, who are on the most intimate terms with M. and Madame de Saint-Herem, always attend the magnificent entertainment which is given at the Hôtel Saint-Ramon on the anniversary of the owner's betrothal, but at midnight Florestan and his wife, who adore each other, for this marriage became a love match, pure and simple, come to partake of the bridal supper at Father Richard's Home.



THE SEVEN CARDINAL SINS
ANGER



ANGER.

CHAPTER I.

THE DUEL.

ABOUT the middle of the carnival season of 1801, a season enlivened by the news of the treaty of peace signed at Lunéville, when Bonaparte was First Consul of the French republic, the following scene took place in a secluded spot overshadowed by the partially dismantled ramparts of the city of Orléans.

It was seven o'clock in the morning, day was just dawning, and the cold was intense, as a tall man, enveloped in a big overcoat of a dark colour, walked to and fro blowing his fingers and stamping his feet, watching intently all the while a narrow footpath that wound around the side of the bastion. In about ten minutes another man, wrapped in a cloak, and heretofore concealed from sight by the projecting wall of the bastion, appeared in the path and hastily advanced toward the man in the long coat.

"I feared I should be late," remarked the man in the cloak.

"We have a quarter of an hour yet," replied the other. "Have you got the swords?"

"Here they are. I had a good deal of trouble in finding them; that was what detained me. Have you seen Yvon this morning?"

"No ; he told me last night that I need not call for him. He feared that our going out together so early would excite his wife's suspicions."

"Well, while we are waiting for him, do enlighten me as to the cause of this quarrel. He was in too much of a hurry last night to tell me anything about the trouble."

"Well, this is about the long and short of it. At the last meeting of the court, a lawyer, named Laurent, made a rather transparent allusion to the pretended partiality of our friend, one of the judges before whom the case was tried."

"Such an insinuation was unworthy of the slightest notice. Yvon Cloarek's honesty is above suspicion."

"Of course ; but you know our friend's extreme irascibility of temper, also, so, springing from his seat and interrupting the advocate in the middle of his discourse, he exclaimed : 'Monsieur Laurent, you are an infamous slanderer. I tell you this not as a magistrate, but as a man, and I will repeat the accusation after the session is over !' You can imagine the commotion this excited in the court-room. It was an odd thing for a magistrate to do, I must admit. Well, after the court adjourned, the other judges tried to appease Yvon, and so did the numerous members of the bar, but you know how pig-headed our friend is. Laurent, too, who is a stubborn sort of fellow, not only refused to apologise himself, but demanded that our friend should. I thought Yvon would choke with rage."

"It seems to me that our friend is right in resenting such an insinuation, but I fear that this duel will prove very detrimental to his career as a magistrate."

"I am afraid so, too, particularly as he has had several lively altercations with the presiding judge of the court, and his violent temper has already compelled him to change his place of residence twice."

"He is a noble fellow at heart, though."

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“ Yes, but his obstinacy and his hot temper make him very hard to get along with.”

“ With such a temperament, his choice of a career was very unfortunate, to say the least.”

“ Yes, but his father, who was a magistrate himself, was anxious his son should adopt the same profession. Yvon adored his father, so he consented. Afterward, when he lost his father, it was too late for our friend to change his profession, even if he had desired to do so; besides, he possesses no fortune, and he has a wife and child, so he has to make the best of the situation.”

“ That is true, but I pity him, nevertheless. But tell me, Yvon is a good swordsman, is he not?”

“ Capital, for he was passionately fond of all such sports in his youth; but I am afraid his undoubted bravery and his hot temper will make him too rash.”

“ And his opponent?”

“ Is considered quite skilful in the use of the weapon. I have a cab a little way off in case of an accident. Yvon lives almost on the edge of the town, fortunately.”

“ I can’t bear to think of any such catastrophe. It would be the death of his wife. You have no idea how much she loves him. She is an angel of sweetness and goodness, and he, in turn, is perfectly devoted to her. They adore each other, and if — But there come the others. I am sorry Yvon did not get here before they did.”

“ Doubtless the precautions he was obliged to take on his wife’s account detained him.”

“ Probably, but it is very annoying.”

The three men who had just rounded the corner of the bastion proved to be Yvon’s adversary and his two seconds. They all greeted the first comers with great courtesy, apologising for having kept them waiting, whereupon M. Cloarek’s friends were obliged to reply that that gentleman had not yet arrived, but would doubtless be there in a minute or two.

One of the lawyer’s seconds then suggested that, to

save time while awaiting M. Cloarek's arrival, they might decide upon the ground, and the choice had just been made when Yvon made his appearance. His panting breath and the perspiration that bedewed his forehead showed how he must have hurried to reach the place even at this late hour, and as he cordially shook hands with his seconds he remarked to them, in a low tone :

"I had no end of trouble in getting off without exciting my wife's suspicions."

Then addressing his adversary in a tone he tried his best to make calm and composed, he added :

"I beg a thousand pardons, monsieur, for having kept you waiting. I assure you the delay was wholly unintentional on my part."

The advocate bowed and proceeded to remove his overcoat, and his example was promptly followed by Cloarek, while the seconds measured the swords. In fact, so great was Yvon's alacrity and ardour, that he was ready for the fray before his opponent, and would have hastily rushed upon him if his seconds had not seized him by the arm.

When the signal was at last given, Cloarek attacked his opponent with such impetuosity that, though the latter tried his best to parry his adversary's rapid thrusts, his guard was beaten down, and in less than two minutes he had received a wound in the forearm which compelled him to drop his weapon.

"Enough, gentlemen!" exclaimed the seconds, on seeing one of the combatants disabled.

But, unfortunately, the Breton had become so frantic with rage, that he did not hear this "Enough, gentlemen," and was about to renew the attack, when his opponent, who had conducted himself very creditably up to that time, being wholly unable to offer any further resistance, made a sudden spring backwards, and then started to run. The now thoroughly enraged Breton

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was starting in pursuit of him, when his seconds rushed upon him and disarmed him, though not without a fierce struggle and considerable danger, while one of the advocate's seconds bound up his slight wound with a handkerchief. Cloarek's second courteously offered his cab to the wounded man, who accepted it, and the parties separated amicably.

"What were you thinking of, Yvon, to rush upon an unarmed enemy?" asked one of the irascible magistrate's friends, as they wended their way back to the city.

"I could not believe it was over so soon," replied Yvon, with a sigh of regret.

"The fight couldn't last long at the rate you were going on."

"If I could only have an hour's fighting, it seems to me I might be peaceable for a long time," replied Yvon, so naively that his friends could not help laughing.

"Well, what of it?" stormed the choleric Breton, with a wrathful glance at his companions.

Then, ashamed of this ebullition of temper, he hung his head as one of his seconds retorted, gaily:

"You needn't try to pick a quarrel with us, my dear fellow. It wouldn't be worth your while. We should only be able to furnish you with a couple of minutes' amusement."

"Yes, yes, be sensible, my dear fellow," good-naturedly remarked the other second. "You ought to consider yourself very fortunate that this affair ended as it did. You are not injured at all, and your adversary's wound is very slight,—a very fortunate ending, you must admit. How we should have felt if we had had to carry you home dead! Think of your wife and your little daughter."

"My wife and daughter!" exclaimed Cloarek, with a violent start. "Ah, yes, you are right."

And the tears rose to his eyes.

"I am a fool, and worse than a fool," he exclaimed.

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"But it is not my fault. A man who has too much blood is always quarrelling, as they used to say down in Brittany."

"Then you had better put your feet in mustard water and call in a doctor to bleed you, my friend, but don't take a sword for a lancet, and, above all, don't draw blood from others under the pretext that you have too much yourself."

"And above all, remember that you are a magistrate, a man of peace," added the other.

"That is all very fine," retorted Yvon, with a sigh, "but you don't know what it is to have a judge's robe on your back and too much blood in your veins."

After he had thanked his seconds heartily for their kind offices, Cloarek was about to separate from them when one of them remarked: "We shall see each other again at the masquerade ball this evening, of course. I understand that all you reverend judges are to allow yourselves considerable license this evening, and disport yourselves like ordinary mortals."

"I did not intend to go, as my wife is not as well as usual; but she insisted so much that I finally consented," replied Yvon.

As he reentered his house, longing to embrace his wife and child even more tenderly than usual, he was accosted by a servant, who said:

"There is a man in your office who wants to see you. His business is urgent, he says."

"Very well. My wife did not ask for me after I went out, did she?"

"No, monsieur, she gave Dame Roberts orders that she was not to be disturbed until she rang, as she wanted to sleep a little later than usual this morning."

"Then take care that she is not disturbed on my account," said Cloarek, as he entered his office.

The person who was waiting for him was a tall, stout man about forty years of age, of herculean stature, with

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a coarse face, and clad in countrified garments. Bowing awkwardly to Yvon, he asked :

“Are you Judge Cloarek ?”

“Yes, monsieur.”

“I am a friend of Father Leblanc, at Gien. You remember him, don’t you ?”

“Yes, and a very worthy man he is. How is his health ?”

“Very good, judge. It was he who said to me : ‘If you’re in trouble, go to Judge Cloarck, he is always kind to us poor folks.’”

“What can I do for you ?”

“I am the father of a young man who is soon to be tried before your court.”

“To what case do you allude, monsieur ?”

“To the case of Joseph Rateau,” said the big man, with a meaning wink, “charged with forgery — only forgery.”

Cloarek, surprised and displeased at the careless manner in which the father spoke of the weighty accusation that was hanging over his son, answered, sternly :

“Yes, monsieur, a prisoner, Joseph Rateau, who is accused of the crime of forgery, is soon to be tried.”

“Yes, judge, and as there’s no use beating about the bush, I may as well say that my son did it, and then, like a fool, allowed himself to be caught.”

“Take care what you say, monsieur. This is a very grave admission on your part.”

“Oh, well, there is no use denying it, judge. It’s as plain as the nose on your face; but for that, do you suppose I would have come here — ”

“Not another word, monsieur ; not another word !” exclaimed Yvon, crimsoning with indignation and anger.

“I quite agree with you, judge. What is the use of talking so much, anyway ? Actions speak louder than words.”

And putting his hand in one of the pockets of his

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long overcoat, he drew out a roll of money and, holding it up between his thumb and forefinger, he remarked, with a cunning smile and another knowing wink :

“ There are fifty louis in here, and if you secure my son’s acquittal, you shall have another fifty.”

The austerity and incorruptibility of the early days of the republic had given place to a deplorable laxness of morals, so the petitioner, believing his case won, triumphantly deposited his roll of gold on a corner of a desk near the door. Cloarek, quite beside himself with rage now, was about to give vent to his wrath and indignation when, his eyes chancing to fall upon a portrait of his wife that was hanging on the wall opposite him, he remembered that she might be disturbed and frightened by the noise, as she occupied the room directly over his office, so, with an almost superhuman effort, he managed to control himself and, picking up his hat, said to the countryman :

“ Take your money. We will talk this matter over outside.”

The countryman, fancying that the judge was influenced solely by prudential motives, put the money back in his pocket, and, taking his big stick unsuspectingly, followed Cloarek out of the house.

“ Where are you going, judge ? ” he asked, as he lumbered along, finding it difficult to keep up with Cloarek, as the latter strode swiftly on.

“ This way,” replied Yvon, in a smothered voice, as he turned the corner of the next street.

This street led to the market-place, which was generally crowded with people at that hour of the day. When Cloarek reached this square, he suddenly turned upon the countryman, and, seizing him by the cravat, cried, in tones of thunder :

“ Look, good people, at this scoundrel. Look at him well, and then witness his chastisement.”

The days of popular agitation were not entirely over,

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and appeals to the populace as well as debates and harangues in public places were by no means rare, so a crowd speedily gathered around the judge and the countryman, who, in spite of his gigantic stature, had not succeeded in freeing himself from the iron grasp of Cloarek, who, shaking him violently, continued in even more vociferous tones :

“ I am judge of the court in this town, and this wretch has offered me gold to acquit a criminal. That is the indignity he has offered me, and this is going to be his punishment.”

And this strange magistrate, whose rage and indignation seemed to endow him with superhuman strength, began to beat the stalwart countryman unmercifully, but the latter, wrenching himself from his assailant’s grasp, sprang back a foot or two, and, lifting his heavy stick, would probably have inflicted a mortal blow upon the enraged Breton if the latter, by one of those adroit manœuvres well known to his compatriots, had not avoided the danger by stooping and rushing, with lowered head, straight upon his adversary with such violence that the terrible blow, delivered straight in the chest, broke two of his ribs, and threw him backward upon the ground unconscious ; then, taking advantage of the excitement in the crowd, Cloarek, desirous of escaping a public ovation if possible, hurried away, and, catching sight of an empty cab, sprang into it and ordered the driver to take him to the Palace of Justice, the hour for the court to open having arrived.

CHAPTER II.

ANOTHER EBULLITION OF TEMPER.

WE will leave M. Cloarek to make his way to the court-house after exploits which would have done honour to one of the gladiators of old, and say a few words in regard to the masquerade ball, to which the impetuous magistrate's seconds had referred on their way back to town after the duel.

This ball, a bold innovation for a provincial town, was to take place that same evening at the house of M. Bonneval, a wealthy merchant, and the father-in-law of the presiding judge of the court to which Yvon Cloarek belonged, and all the members of the court having been invited to this entertainment, and some disguise being obligatory, it had been decided to wear either a black domino, or costumes of a sufficiently grave character not to compromise the dignity of the body.

Cloarek was one of the invited guests. The account of his duel of the morning as well as the chastisement he had inflicted upon the countryman, though noised about the town, had not reached Madame Cloarek's ears at nightfall, so the magistrate's household was calm, and occupied, like many others in the town, in preparations for the evening's festivities, for in those days masquerade parties were rare in the provinces. The dining-room of the modest home, strewn with fabrics of divers colours as well as scraps of gold and silver embroidery and braid, looked very much like a dressmaker's estab-

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lishment. Three young sewing-women chattering like magpies were working there under the superintendence of an honest, pleasant-faced woman about thirty years of age, whom they called Dame Roberts. This worthy woman, after having served as a nurse for M. Cloarek's daughter, now acted as maid, or rather confidential attendant to Madame Cloarek ; for, in consequence of her devotion and faithful service, relations of affectionate familiarity had been established between her and her mistress.

"One scallop more, and this embroidered ribbon will be sewed on the hat," remarked one of the young sewing-women.

"I have finished hemming the sash," remarked the second girl.

"I have only two more silver buttons to sew on the waistcoat," added the third.

"That is well, girls," said Dame Roberts. "M. Cloarek's costume will be one of the most effective there, I am sure."

"It seems very odd to think of a judge in a masquerade costume, all the same."

"Nonsense ! don't they disguise themselves every day when they put their robes on ?"

"A judge's robe is not a disguise, but a badge of office, you ought to understand," said Dame Roberts, severely.

"Excuse me, Dame Roberts," replied the offender, blushing to the roots of her hair, "I meant no harm, I am sure."

"What a pity it is that Madame Cloarek is not going!" remarked one of the other girls, in the hope of giving a more agreeable turn to the conversation.

"Ah, if I were in Madame Cloarek's place, I wouldn't miss such an opportunity. A masquerade ball ! why, it is a piece of good fortune that may present itself but once in a lifetime. But here comes M. Segoffin. Good

day, M. Segoffin ! And how does M. Segoffin find himself to-day ? ”

The newcomer was a tall, thin man about forty years of age, with an immensely long nose, slightly turned up at the end, which imparted a very peculiar expression to his face. His complexion was so white and his beardless face so impassible that he looked exactly like a clown, and the resemblance was heightened by a pair of piercing black eyes, which gave a mocking expression to his face, and by a small, round black wig. A long gray overcoat, brown knee-breeches, blue and white striped stockings, and low shoes with big silver buckles formed the every-day costume of M. Segoffin, who carried a red umbrella under his arm and an old cocked hat in his hand.

After having remained twenty years in the service of M. Cloarek’s father, at that gentleman’s death he transferred his allegiance to the son whom he had known as a child, and whom he served with unwearying devotion.

On his entrance, as we have just remarked, he was greeted with mocking laughs and exclamations of —

“ Here comes M. Segoffin. Ah, good day, M. Segoffin ! ” But without losing his habitual *sang-froid* in the least, he laid his umbrella and hat down on a chair, and, seizing the prettiest of his tormentors in his long arms, kissed her loudly on both cheeks in spite of her shrieks and spirited resistance. Well satisfied with this beginning, he was preparing to repeat the offence when Madame Roberts, seizing him by one of his coat-tails, exclaimed, indignantly :

“ Segoffin, Segoffin ! such behaviour is outrageous ! ”

“ That which is done is done,” said Segoffin, sententiously, passing his long, bony hand across his lips with an air of retrospective enjoyment, as the young sewing-woman quitted the room with her companions, all laughing like mad and exclaiming : “ Good night, M. Segoffin, good night.”

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Left alone with the delinquent, Dame Roberts exclaimed :

“ Would any one on earth but you coolly commit such enormities in the respectable household of a magistrate ? ”

“ What on earth do you mean, I should like to know ? ”

“ Why, hugging and kissing that girl right under my very nose when you are persecuting me with your declarations of love all the time.”

“ I do believe you’re jealous ! ”

“ Jealous ! Get that idea out of your head as soon as possible. If I ever do marry again,— which God forbid ! — it certainly will not be you I choose for a husband.”

“ Are you sure of that ? ”

“ Perfectly sure.”

“ That which is to be, will be, my dear.”

“ But — ”

“ Nonsense ! ” exclaimed her phlegmatic companion, interrupting her with the most positive air imaginable. “ You are dying to marry me, and you will marry me, so it is not worth while to say any more about it.”

“ You are right,” exclaimed the woman, exasperated by her interlocutor’s overweening conceit. “ I think, with you, that we had better drop the subject. Monsieur’s costume is finished. Take it up to his room, for he will return from court very soon, I am sure.”

“ From court,” sighed Segoffin, shaking his head sadly.

A sigh was such a rare thing for this impassive individual to indulge in, that Dame Roberts’s anxiety was aroused, and she asked, quickly :

“ Why are you sighing like a furnace, you who display no emotion at all, ordinarily ? ”

“ I expected it,” remarked Segoffin, shaking his head dubiously.

“ What has happened ? Tell me at once, for Heaven’s sake.”

“ M. Cloarek has thrown the chief judge of the court

out of the window," responded Segoffin, with another sigh.

"*Mon Dieu!*"

"There is no undoing that which is done."

"But what you say is absurd."

"It was out of a window on the first floor, so he didn't have far to fall," said Segoffin, thoughtfully, "and the presiding judge is sure to have landed on his feet as usual. He's a sharp fellow."

"Look here, Segoffin, I don't believe a single word you're telling me. It is only one of those cock-and-bull stories you're so fond of inventing, and it is really a shame for you to make merry at monsieur's expense, when he has always been so kind to you."

"Very well, you may think I am joking, if you want to," replied Segoffin, coldly, "but you had better give me monsieur's costume. He told me to take it up to his room, and he will be here before very long now."

"It is really true that there has been a scene between monsieur and the chief judge, then?" exclaimed Suzanne.

"Of course, as monsieur threw him out of the window."

"Oh, *mon Dieu! mon Dieu!* Monsieur will lose his place this time, then."

"Why?"

"Why? Why, after such scandalous behaviour on the part of a magistrate he is sure to lose his office, I tell you, and poor madame! What a shock it will be to her in her condition. What a life she leads! obliged to be always on the watch, adoring her husband, but in mortal terror all the while as to what he may say or do. But tell me how you happened to hear of this calamity?"

"Well, I went to the palace an hour ago to take monsieur a letter. I found the whole place in a hubbub. The lawyers and all the rest of the people in the building were racing to and fro, and asking: 'Have you heard about it?' 'Is it possible?' It seems that after the court adjourned, the presiding judge summoned M.

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Cloarek into his office. He wanted to see him about his duel, some said."

"His duel? What duel?"

"The duel he fought this morning," answered Segoffin, phlegmatically.

And taking advantage of his companion's speechless consternation, he continued :

"Others declared that the chief judge had sent for him to see about a fracas monsieur had had with a countryman whom he nearly killed."

"What countryman?" asked Suzanne, with increasing alarm.

"The last one," answered Segoffin, naïvely. "Well, it seems, or at least so they told me at the palace, that monsieur went into the presiding judge's private office; they got to quarrelling, and one man finally threw the other man out of the window, and I know monsieur so well," added Segoffin, with a satisfied smile, "that I said to myself, 'If any one was thrown out of the window it must have been the other man, not monsieur,' and I was right. There is no undoing that which has been done."

"There is no undoing that which has been done? That tiresome old saying is for ever in your mouth, it seems to me. Is it possible you cannot see the consequences of all this?"

"What is to be, will be."

"Fine consolation that, is it not? This is the third time monsieur has run a great risk of losing his place in consequence of giving way to his temper, and this time he will be put out, sure."

"Well, if he loses his place, he will lose it."

"Indeed! But he needs the office on account of his wife and little daughter, and as there will be still another mouth to feed before many months have passed, what is to become of him and his family if he loses his position?"

"Your question is too much for me. I had better be getting up-stairs with this toggery, I know that, though."

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"Have you lost your senses completely? Monsieur isn't really thinking of going to this entertainment to-night, after what has occurred!"

"He isn't? That shows how much you know about it."

"But after what has occurred, he surely will not go to this ball, I say."

"You see if he doesn't."

"What, go to a ball given by the presiding judge's father-in-law?"

"He is all the more likely to on that very account."

"But it is impossible, I tell you. Monsieur would not dare after all the scandalous occurrences of this unfortunate day. The whole town will be up in arms if he does."

"He is ready for them."

"He is ready for them?"

"Most assuredly. He is not the man to draw back, no matter how many persons league themselves together against him," responded Segoffin, with a triumphant air. "I saw him after his row with the presiding judge, and I said to him, 'Aren't you afraid you will be arrested, M. Yvon?' 'No one has any business to meddle with what passed between me and the chief justice so long as he doesn't complain, and he is not likely to do that, for if the cause of our quarrel should be made public he would be hopelessly disgraced.' Those were monsieur's very words, Suzanne. 'Well, will you go to the ball just the same?' I asked. 'Certainly. I intend to be the first to go and the last to leave. Otherwise people might think I regretted what I had done, or that I was afraid. If my presence at this fête scandalises anybody, and they show it in any way, I shall know what to say and do, never fear; so go back home, and have my costume ready for me when I get there.'"

"What a man of iron he is!" sighed Suzanne. "Always the same, and poor madame suspects nothing."

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"I will take the costume up to monsieur's room and wait for him there, for I am as certain that he will go to this entertainment as I am that you will marry me some day, remember that.

"If such a misfortune is ever to befall me, I shall try to keep it out of my mind as much as possible," retorted Dame Roberts, curtly, as she hastened off to her mistress.

CHAPTER III.

THE WARNING.

AT first Suzanne felt strongly inclined to inform Madame Cloarek of the momentous events which had occurred that day, but after reflecting on the effect this news might have upon the young wife, she abandoned that idea and resolved to confine herself to an effort to make her mistress devise some pretext for preventing M. Cloarek from attending the masquerade ball, realising that such an audacious act on his part might have the most disastrous consequences.

Suzanne's position was extremely trying, for it was necessary for her to conceal the events of the day from her mistress, on the one hand, and yet implore her to use her influence over her husband to prevent him from going to this entertainment, on the other.

She was consequently in a very perplexed frame of mind when she entered the apartment of her mistress, who, without being really beautiful in the general acceptation of the word, had a remarkably sweet and attractive face, though the extreme pallor of her complexion and her frail appearance generally indicated very delicate health.

Jenny Cloarek, seated beside a swinging crib, the silken curtains of which were closely drawn, was occupied with some embroidery, while with her little foot she occasionally imparted a gentle oscillatory motion to the little bed in which her five-year-old daughter was repos-

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ing. It was night, and the soft light of a lamp illumined the peaceful picture.

When Suzanne entered the room, Madame Cloarek held up a finger warningly, and said to her, in a low tone :

“ Don’t make a noise, Suzanne. My little Sabine is just going to sleep.”

And as the maid approached on tiptoe her mistress added : “ Has my husband returned yet ? ”

“ No, madame.”

“ His going out so early this morning upset me for all day, for I was asleep when he came back, and so long a time seldom elapses without my seeing him. By the way, is his costume finished, and is it a success ? You know I promised my husband I would make no attempt to see it until I could see it on him.”

“ It is very handsome, madame.”

“ And you think it will prove becoming ? ”

“ Extremely, madame.”

“ I am almost sorry now that I made up my mind not to go to this entertainment. I never attended a masquerade ball in my life, and I should have enjoyed it immensely ; but I shall enjoy Yvon’s account of it almost as much, provided he does not stay too late, for I feel rather more tired and weak than usual to-day, it seems to me.”

“ Madame does not feel as well as usual this evening ? ”

“ No ; still I do not complain, for it is one of those sufferings that promise me new joys,” she added, with a smile of ineffable sweetness.

As she spoke the young mother leaned forward and cautiously parted the curtains of the crib, then after a moment of blissful contemplation she added, as she again settled herself in her armchair :

“ The dear little thing is sleeping very sweetly, now. Ah, my good Suzanne, with a husband and child like

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mine, what more could I ask for in this world, unless it be a little better health so I may be able to nurse my next child, for do you know, Suzanne, I used to be dreadfully jealous of you for acting as part mother to my little Sabine ? But now my health is better, it seems to me I have nothing more to ask for. Even my dear Yvon's impetuosity, which used to cause me so much uneasiness, seems to have subsided of late. Poor fellow, how often I witnessed his efforts to overcome, not a fault, but his very nature. Had it been a fault, with his energy and determination of character, he would have overcome it years and years ago ; but at last, thank Heaven, his disposition seems to have become much more even."

" Undoubtedly, madame," replied Suzanne, " monsieur's temper is much more even now."

" And when I think how kind and gentle he has always been to me," continued the young wife, tenderly, " and how I have never been the object or the cause of any of the terrible ebullitions of temper which I have witnessed with so much terror, and which have often proved so disastrous in their consequences to him, I realise how devotedly he must love me ! "

" He would indeed be a madman to fly in a passion with one as kind and gentle as you, my poor dear lady."

" Hush, flatterer," replied Jenny, smiling. " It is not my amiability of disposition, but his love for me that prevents it, and though I am almost ashamed to confess it, I cannot help feeling proud sometimes when I think that I have never excited any feeling but the tenderest consideration in such an impassioned and indomitable nature."

" Monsieur is really one of the best-hearted men in the world, madame, and, as you say, it must be his temperament that carries him away in spite of himself, for unfortunately with characters like these the merest trifle may lead to a terrible explosion."

" What you say is so true, Suzanne, that my poor

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husband, in order not to expose himself to dangers of that kind, spends nearly all his evenings at home with me instead of seeking amusement as so many persons do in public places where his quick temper might involve him in endless difficulties."

"I think, madame, with you, that for your own peace of mind, and monsieur's as well, it is advisable to avoid all places where there is any danger of one's anger being aroused, so, madame, if you will take my advice—"

"Well, Suzanne, why do you pause so suddenly? What is the matter?"

"I—I—"

"Go on, Suzanne."

"Don't you fear that the masquerade ball this evening—"

"Well?"

"Is a rather dangerous place for monsieur to go?"

"What an absurd idea!"

"There will be a great many people there."

"True; but they will be the best people in town, as the ball is given by the father-in-law of the presiding judge."

"Undoubtedly, madame, but I think I have heard that people chaff each other a good deal at these masquerade balls, and if monsieur, being quick-tempered, should take offence—"

"You are right, Suzanne. I had not thought of that."

"I don't like to worry you, madame, still—"

"On the other hand, my husband is too much of a gentleman, and too used to the ways of the world, to take offence at any of the liberties permissible at such an entertainment; besides, his intimate relations with the court over which M. Bonneval's son-in-law presides make it almost obligatory upon him to attend this ball, for it having been agreed that all the members of the court should go, Yvon's absence might be considered a mark of disrespect to the presiding judge, to whom my husband is really subordinate."

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"My poor lady! if she but knew how her husband evinces his subordination to the presiding judge," thought Suzanne.

"No, you need have no fear, Suzanne," continued the young wife, "the presiding judge's very presence at this entertainment, the deference Yvon must feel for him, will necessitate the maintenance of the utmost decorum on his part; besides, my husband's absence would be sure to excite remark."

"Still, madame —"

"Oh, I shall urge Yvon to be very prudent," added Jenny, smiling, "but I see no reason why he should not avail himself of an opportunity for enjoyment that our retired life will make doubly pleasant to him."

So Suzanne, fearing the consequences of her mistress's blindness, said, resolutely:

"Madame, monsieur must not be allowed to attend this fête."

"I do not understand you, Suzanne."

"Heed what I say, madame, and for your own sake and the sake of your child prevent monsieur from attending this entertainment," exclaimed Suzanne, clasping her hands imploringly.

"What is the matter, Suzanne? You alarm me."

"You know how entirely I am devoted to you, madame?"

"Yes; but explain."

"You know perfectly well, too, that I would not run any risk of alarming you if it were not absolutely necessary. Believe me, some terrible misfortune is likely to happen if monsieur attends this fête."

Dame Roberts could say no more, for just then the door opened, and Yvon Cloarek entered his wife's room. Suzanne dared not remain any longer, so she departed, but not until after she had given her mistress one more imploring look.

CHAPTER IV.

“ THOSE WHOM THE GODS DESTROY THEY FIRST MAKE MAD.”

YVON CLOAREK was only about thirty years of age, and the Breton costume in which he had just arrayed himself set off his robust and symmetrical figure to admirable advantage.

This severe but elegant costume consisted of a rather long black jacket elaborately embroidered with yellow on the collar and sleeves, and still further ornamented with rows of tiny silver buttons set very close together. The waistcoat, too, was black, and trimmed with embroidery and buttons to match the jacket. A broad sash of orange silk encircled the waist. Large trousers of white linen, almost as wide as the floating skirt of the Greek Palikares, extended to the knee. Below, his shapely limbs were encased in tight-fitting buckskin leggings. He wore a round, nearly flat hat, encircled with an orange ribbon embroidered with silver, the ends of which hung down upon his shoulders. Thanks to this costume and to his thick golden hair, his eyes blue as the sea itself, his strong features, and his admirable carriage, Cloarek was an admirable type of the valiant race of Breton Bretons, of the sturdy sons of Armorica, as the historians style them.

When he entered his wife's room, Yvon's face was still a trifle clouded, and though he made a powerful effort to conceal the feelings which the exciting events of the day had aroused, his wife, whose apprehensions had already been awakened by Dame Roberts's warning,

was struck by the expression of his face. He, entirely ignorant of these suspicions on her part, having done everything possible to conceal the disquieting occurrences of the day from her, approached very slowly and pausing a few steps from his wife, asked, smilingly :

“ Well, how do you like my costume, Jenny ? I hope I am faithful to the traditions of my native province, and that I shall represent Brittany creditably at the fête ? ”

“ There isn’t the slightest doubt that the costume of your native province is wonderfully becoming,” replied the young mother, with some embarrassment.

“ Really ? Well, I am delighted,” said Yvon, kissing his wife fondly ; “ you know I set great store by your approval even in the most trifling matters, my dear.”

“ Yes,” replied Madame Cloarek, with deep feeling, “ yes, I know your tender love for me, your deference to my slightest wish.”

“ Great credit I deserve for that ! It is so easy and pleasant to defer to you, my Jenny,— to bow this hard, stiff Breton neck before you, and say : ‘ I abdicate to you. Command ; I will obey.’ ”

“ Ah, my dear Yvon, if you only knew how happy it makes me to hear you say that, to-day especially.”

These last words failed to attract Yvon’s attention, however, and he continued :

“ What are the little concessions I make, my dearest, in comparison with the blissful happiness I owe to you ? Think,” he added, turning to the crib, “ this little angel that is the joy of my life, who gave her to me ? ” And he was about to open the curtains, when his wife said to him, warningly :

“ Take care, Yvon, she is asleep.”

“ Let me just take one peep at her, only one. I have not seen her all day.”

“ The light of the lamp might arouse her, my dear, and the poor little thing has just had such a trying time.”

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“What! has she been ill?” inquired Cloarek, anxiously, leaving the cradle. “Do you really feel uneasy about her?”

“Not now, my dear, but you know how extremely nervous and excitable she is. She resembles me only too much in this respect,” added Jenny, with a melancholy smile.

“And I, far from regretting that the dear child is so impressionable, rejoice at it, on the contrary, for I hope she will be endowed with the same exquisite sensibility of feeling that you are.”

The young woman gently shook her head.

“This is what happened. Our big Newfoundland dog came into the room, and frightened the poor little thing so that I had great difficulty in quieting her afterward.”

“I am thankful it was nothing serious. But how have you passed the day? You were asleep this morning, and I would not wake you. You know how much solicitude I always feel about your health, but it is even more precious to me than ever now,” he added, smiling tenderly upon her.

Jenny slipped her little frail white hand into her husband’s.

“What courage your love gives me,” she murmured, softly. “Thanks to that, I can even bear suffering bravely.”

“Then you have not been feeling as well as usual to-day?” exclaimed Yvon, anxiously. “Tell me, Jenny, why didn’t you send for the doctor?”

“I did not need to, for have I not a great and learned physician in whom I have perfect confidence, and who I am sure will not refuse me any attention I ask?”

“Yes, I understand. I am that great and learned physician, I suppose.”

“And could I select a more careful and devoted one?”

“No, certainly not; so go on and consult me, Jenny.”

“My dear Yvon, though I have not undergone any

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very severe suffering to-day, I have experienced and I still experience a sort of vague uneasiness, as well as an unusual depression of spirits. Oh, don't be alarmed, it is nothing serious; besides, you can cure me completely if you will, my beloved doctor."

"How? Tell me at once."

"But will you do it?"

"Why, Jenny,—what a question!"

"I repeat that my cure depends absolutely and entirely upon you."

"So much the better, then, for, in that case, you are cured. Go on; explain, my charming invalid."

"Remain with me, then."

"Have I any intention of leaving you?"

"But the entertainment this evening?" ventured the young wife, hesitatingly.

"I dressed early, you see, so as to be able to remain with you until the very last moment."

"Don't leave me this evening, Yvon."

"What?"

"Give up this fête for my sake."

"You cannot mean it, surely."

"Stay at home with me."

"But, Jenny, you yourself insisted that—"

"That you should accept the invitation. That is true. This very morning I was rejoicing that you were going to have this diversion,—you who lead such an extremely quiet life."

"Then why have you changed your mind so suddenly?"

"How can I tell?" responded the young wife, much embarrassed. "It is only an absurd and senseless whim on my part, doubtless. All I know is that you would make me happy, oh, very happy, if you would do what I ask, absurd and ridiculous as it may appear to you."

"My poor darling," Yvon said, tenderly, after a

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moment's reflection, “in your condition, and nervous as you are, I can easily understand why you should, in spite of your good sense, be beset with all sorts of contradictory notions, and that you should be averse in the evening to what you most wished for in the morning. Do you suppose I should think of such a thing as blaming you for that ?”

“ You are the best and most kind-hearted man in the world, Yvon ! ” exclaimed the young wife, her eyes filling with tears of joy, for she felt sure now that her husband was going to accede to her wishes. “ There are not many men who would be so patient with the whims of a poor woman who knows neither what she wants nor why she wants it.”

“ But in my character of physician I do, you see,” replied Yvon, kissing his wife's brow tenderly. “ Look,” he added, glancing at the clock, “ it is now nine o'clock ; ten minutes to go, ten to return, and a quarter of an hour to remain at the ball,—it is a matter of three-quarters of an hour at most. I will be back here by ten o'clock, I promise you.”

“ What, Yvon, you persist in your determination to attend this entertainment ? ”

“ Just to show myself there, that is all.”

“ I beg you will not, Yvon.”

“ What do you mean ? ”

“ Don't go.”

“ What ! not even for a few moments ? ”

“ Do not leave me this evening, I entreat you.”

“ But, be reasonable, Jenny.”

“ Make this slight sacrifice for my sake, I implore you.”

“ But, Jenny, this is childish.”

“ Call it childishness, idiocy, what you will, but don't leave me this evening.”

“ Jenny, love, it breaks my heart to see you so unreasonable, for I am obliged to refuse you.”

“Yvon — ”

“It is absolutely necessary for me to show myself at this entertainment, though I need remain only a few moments.”

“But, my dear Yvon — ”

A flush of impatience mounted to Cloarek’s brow, nevertheless he controlled himself, and said to his wife in the same affectionate though slightly reproachful tone :

“Such persistency on your part surprises me, Jenny. You know I am not in the habit of having to be begged. On the contrary, I have always endeavoured to anticipate your wishes, so spare me the annoyance of being obliged to say ‘no’ to you for the first time in my life.”

“Great Heavens !” exclaimed the now thoroughly distressed woman, “to think of your attaching so much importance to a mere pleasure — ”

“Pleasure !” exclaimed Yvon, bitterly, his eyes kindling. Then restraining himself, he added :

“If it were a question of pleasure, you would not have been obliged to ask me but once, Jenny.”

“But if you are not going for pleasure, why do you go at all ?”

“I am going for appearance’s sake,” replied Yvon, promptly.

“In that case, can’t you let appearances go, just this once, for my sake ?”

“I must attend this entertainment, Jenny,” said Yvon, whose face had become purple now ; “I must and shall, so say no more about it.”

“And I say that you shall not,” exclaimed the young woman, unable to conceal her alarm any longer ; “for there must be some grave reason that you are concealing from me to make you persist in refusing, when you are always so kind and affectionate to me.”

“Jenny !” exclaimed Cloarek, stamping his foot,

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angrily, for this opposition was intensely exasperating to a person of his irascible nature, “not another word! Do you hear me? Not another word!”

“Listen to me, Yvon,” said his wife, with dignity. “I shall resort to subterfuge no longer. It is unworthy of us both. I am afraid, yes, afraid for you to go to this fête, for I have been told that your presence there might cause trouble.”

“Who told you that? who said that? Answer me!” cried Cloarek, in a more and more angry tone, and so loudly that the child in the crib woke. “Why should you feel afraid? You have heard something, then, I suppose.”

“There is something, then, Yvon,” cried the poor woman, more and more alarmed. “There is some terrible thing that you are keeping from me!”

Yvon remained silent and motionless for a moment, for a violent struggle was going on in his breast, but calmness and reason finally conquered, and approaching his wife to kiss her before going out, he said:

“I shall return almost immediately, Jenny. You will not have to wait for me long.”

But the young woman hastily sprang up, and, before her husband could make a movement to prevent it, she had run to the door, locked it, and removed the key; then turning to Yvon, she said, with all the energy of despair:

“You shall not leave this room. We will see if you dare to come and take this key from me.”

Utterly stupefied at first, then exasperated beyond expression by Jenny’s determined action, he gave way to his anger to such an extent that his features became unrecognisable. The flush that had suffused his face was succeeded by a livid pallor, his eyes became bloodshot, and, advancing threateningly toward his wife, he exclaimed, in a terrible voice:

“The key! give me the key!”

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"No, I will save you in spite of yourself," replied Jenny, intrepidly.

"Wretch!" cried Cloarek, now completely beside himself.

The young woman had never been the object of her husband's anger before in her life, so it is impossible to convey any idea of the horror she experienced on seeing him ready to rush upon her. Terrified by his ferocious, bloodthirsty look, in which there seemed to be not even the slightest gleam of recognition, she remained for a moment trembling and motionless, feeling as if she were about to swoon. Suddenly the little girl, who had been awakened several minutes before by the loud talking, parted the curtains of her crib and looked out. Not recognising her father, and mistaking him for a stranger, as she had never before seen him in such a costume, she uttered a shrill cry of terror, and exclaimed :

"Oh, mamma, the black man! the black man!"

"The key! give me the key!" repeated Cloarek, in thunder tones, taking another step toward his wife, who, slipping the key in her bosom, ran to the crib and caught her child in her arms, while the little girl, more and more terrified, hid her face on her mother's breast, sobbing :

"Oh, that black man, that black man, he means to kill mamma!"

"To take this key from me, you will have to tear my child from my arms," said the frail but courageous woman.

"You don't know that I am capable of anything when I am angry," exclaimed the unfortunate man, aroused to such a pitch of fury as to be blind and deaf to the most sacred sentiments. As he spoke, he rushed toward his wife in such a frenzied, menacing manner that the unfortunate woman, believing herself lost, strained her little daughter to her breast, and, bowing her head, cried :

“WHOM THE GODS DESTROY.”

“Spare, oh, spare my child!”

This cry of agony and of maternal despair penetrated to the innermost depths of Yvon’s soul. He stopped short, then quicker than thought he turned, and, with a strength that his fury rendered irresistible, dashed himself against the door with such impetuosity that it gave way.

On hearing the sound, Madame Cloarek raised her head in even greater terror, for her child was in convulsions, caused by fright, and seemed likely to die in her arms.

“Help!” faltered Jenny, faintly. “Help, Yvon, our child is dying!”

A despairing cry answered these panting words uttered by Jenny, who felt that she, too, was dying, for in this delicate woman’s critical condition such a shock was almost certain to prove fatal.

“Yvon, our child is dying!”

Cloarek, who was still only a few yards off, heard these lamentable words. The horror of the thought that his child was dying dispelled his anger as if by magic, and, rushing wildly back into his wife’s room, he saw her still standing by the crib, but already as livid as a spectre.

With a supreme effort Jenny extended her arms to place her child in her husband’s hands, faltering:

“Take her, I am dying,” and without another word fell heavily at the feet of Cloarek, who, with his child strained to his breast, stood as if dazed, hearing nothing, seeing nothing.

CHAPTER V.

DEADLY ENMITY.

TWELVE years after the events we have just related, late in the month of March, 1812, about two o'clock in the afternoon a traveller walked into the inn known as the Imperial Eagle, the only tavern in the town of Sorville, which was then the second station on the post-road between Dieppe and Paris.

This traveller, who was a man in the prime of life, wore a tarpaulin hat and a thick blue reefer jacket, and looked like a petty officer or a sailing master in the merchant service. His hair and whiskers were red, his complexion light, his expression stern and impassible, and he spoke French without the slightest accent though he was an Englishman.

Walking straight up to the landlord, he said : “ Can you tell me if a dark-complexioned man dressed about as I am, but very dark-complexioned and with a strong Italian accent, did not come here this morning ? His name is Pietri.”

“ I have seen no one answering either to that name or description, monsieur.”

“ Are you sure ?”

“ Perfectly sure.”

“ Is there any other inn in the town ?”

“ No, thank Heaven ! monsieur, so parties travelling either by diligence or post patronise me, as the post-station is only a few yards from my door.”

“ So there is a relay station near here.”

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"On the other side of the street, almost directly opposite."

"Can you give me a room and have a breakfast prepared for two persons? I am expecting some one who will call and inquire for Master Dupont, for that is my name."

"Very well, monsieur."

"As soon as this person comes, you will serve breakfast in my room."

"Very well, and monsieur's baggage, shall I send for that?"

"I have no baggage. Have many post-carriages passed to-day?"

"Not a single one, monsieur."

"Neither from Paris nor Dieppe?"

"No, monsieur, neither from Paris nor Dieppe. But, by the way, as you came from the last named place, you must have seen those wonderful men everybody is talking about."

"What wonderful men?"

"Why, that famous corsair who is death to the English, the brave Captain l'Endurei (a good name for a privateer, isn't it?). With his brig *The Hell-hound* (another appropriate name by the way), that goes through the water like a fish, not a single English ship seems to escape him. He gobbles them all up, his last haul being a number of vessels loaded with wheat, that he captured after a terrible fight. A wonderful piece of good luck, for wheat is so scarce now! They say the people of Dieppe have gone wild over him! He must have been born under a lucky star, for though it is said that he fights like a tiger, he has never been wounded. Is that true? Do you know him? What kind of a looking man is he? He must be terribly ferocious-looking, and people say he dresses very strangely. You, being a sailor, have probably seen him."

"Never," dryly replied the stranger, who did not

appear to share the innkeeper's admiration for the privateer.

Then he added :

" Show me to my room, and when the person who inquires for Master Dupont comes, bring him to me at once. Do you understand ? "

" Perfectly, monsieur."

" And as soon as the person comes you are to serve breakfast."

" Very well, monsieur. I will show you to your room now."

" Is it a front room ? "

" Yes, monsieur, with two large windows."

" I want some of your best wine, remember."

" Give yourself no uneasiness ; you will be perfectly satisfied, I think," replied the innkeeper.

About a quarter of an hour afterward a second guest entered the inn. This man also wore a heavy pea-jacket, and his swarthy skin, jet-black hair, and hard, almost repulsive features gave him a decidedly sinister appearance. After casting a quick glance around, the newcomer said, in bad French, and with an Italian accent, for he was a native of the island of Malta :

" Is there a man named Dupont here ? "

" Yes, monsieur, and I will take you to his room at once if you will follow me."

Subsequently, when the host had placed breakfast on the table, he received orders to retire and not return until he was summoned.

As soon as the two strangers found themselves alone together, the Maltese, striking the table a terrible blow with his clenched fist, exclaimed in English :

" That dog of a smuggler has backed out ; all is lost ! "

" What are you saying ? "

The truth, as surely as I would take delight in burying this knife in the heart of the coward who betrayed us," and as he spoke he plunged his knife into the table.

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“ Damnation ! ” exclaimed the Englishman, startled out of his usual phlegm, “ and the captain is to pass through the town about nightfall.”

“ Are you sure ? ”

“ This morning just as I was leaving Dieppe our friend told me that the captain had ordered post-horses for four o’clock this afternoon, so he will arrive here between five and six.”

“ *Mille tonnerres !* everything seemed to favour our plans, and but for this miserable smuggler — ”

“ Pietri, the case is not so desperate as you think, perhaps, after all. At all events this violence will avail nothing, so let us talk the matter over calmly.”

“ Calmly, when rage fairly blinds me ! ”

“ A blind man can not see his road.”

“ If you can be calm, you do not hate this man as I do.”

“ I do not ? ”

It is impossible to give the reader any adequate conception of the tone in which the Englishman uttered these words.

After a pause, he resumed, in a tone of concentrated hatred :

“ I must hate him worse than you hate him, Pietri, as I do not wish to kill him.”

“ A dead serpent bites no more.”

“ Yes, but a dead serpent suffers no more, and I want to see this man suffer a thousand worse tortures than death. He must atone for the evil he has done my country ; he must atone for the bloody victories which have demoralised our cruisers ; he must atone for the recent insult offered to me. D—n him ! Am I such an insignificant enemy that I can be released simply upon parole after the combat that cost us so much treasure and blood, but without one drop of his being shed, for he really seems to be invulnerable as they say. As surely as there is a hell my disgrace and England’s shall be avenged.”

"And yet a moment ago Captain Russell was reproaching me for the foolish violence of my words," retorted the Maltese, with a sardonic smile.

"You are right," replied Russell, controlling himself. "Such an outburst is foolish in the extreme. Besides, we must not despair. What passed between you and the smuggler?"

"Leaving Dieppe in a fishing-smack last night, I reached Hosey this morning and made my way to the man's hut, which stands some distance farther down the beach. 'Is your name Bezelek?' I asked. 'Yes.' 'I was sent here by Master Keller.' 'What is the countersign?' '*Passe-partout.*' 'Good! I have been expecting you. My boat is at your service. It is high tide at ten o'clock to-night, and the wind, if it doesn't change, will take you to England before morning.' 'Master Keller told you what is to be done?' 'Yes, some one is to be transported to England, willy-nilly, but safe and sound, understand. I am a smuggler, but no murderer. So bring your passenger along to-night and I promise you he shall be in England before sunrise.' 'Did Keller tell you that I must have four or five of your most determined men at my disposal?' 'What for?' 'To assist me in capturing the man on the highway a few miles from here.' 'Keller told me nothing of the kind, and you need not expect me or my men to mix ourselves up in any such affair. Bring your man here, and I will see that he is put aboard my boat. That is all. If he resists, I can suppose he is drunk, and that it is for his good we are putting him aboard, but to assist in the abduction of a man on the public highway is a very different thing, and I have no notion of doing anything of the kind.' That was what he said, and he stuck to it. I soon discovered there wasn't the slightest chance of moving him, for neither threats nor bribes had the slightest effect upon him."

"This is too bad! too bad!"

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"So you see, Russell, we shall have to resort to other means, for even if the postilion remains neutral, it would be impossible for us two to do the job without assistance, especially as the captain has a devoted and intrepid companion in the shape of his head gunner, who never leaves him either on land or sea, so if we resort to force we shall only make fools of ourselves, it seems to me."

"That is true," muttered the Englishman, gloomily.

"So as there is no chance of succeeding by violence we shall have to resort to stratagem," continued the Maltese.

"Explain."

"On my way here I noticed that about two miles from the town, at a place marked by a stone cross, there is a steep hill, followed by a no less abrupt descent."

"Well, what of it?"

"We will lie in wait for the carriage about half-way up the hill. It will be moving very slowly as the hill is so steep, and we will suddenly rush out from our hiding-place, and, pretending that we are sailors on our way back to our vessel, ask the captain for aid, you at one door and I at the other. Both of us will have our pistols loaded and our knives in our belts and —"

"Never!" exclaimed Russell, "I am no assassin nor do I desire this man's death. The murder would be a disgrace to England; besides, it would only half avenge me. No, what I want is to enjoy this indomitable man's rage and humiliation when, as our prisoner, he is exposed to the abuse and derision and insults of the multitudes whom his name has so often terrified. No caged tiger ever roared and chafed against confinement more wildly and yet more impotently than he will. Imprisonment in the hulks will be a thousand times more terrible than death to such a man. But the obstinacy of this smuggler ruins all my plans. As they have become impossibilities, what shall we do?"

"Adopt mine," urged the Maltese. "Death may be

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less cruel than vengeance, but it is much more certain ; besides, vengeance is impossible now, but we hold this man's life in our hands. Besides, what difference does it really make about the means we employ so long as England is delivered from one of her most dangerous enemies ? ”

“ Say no more.”

“ But think of the vessels this man has captured and burned, and of the bloody combats from which he has emerged safe and sound and victorious, too, in spite of greatly inferior numbers ! ”

“ Be silent, I tell you.”

“ Think of the terror his name inspires in English sailors — the best seamen in the world ; haven't you even heard them say in their superstitious fear that the success of this invincible and invulnerable man seems to indicate the swift decadence of England's maritime supremacy, and that the sea is to have its Napoleon as well as the land ? Think what a disastrous effect such a superstition will have if the time ever comes when England makes an attempt to overthrow Bonaparte and crush France.”

“ But a murder, — a cowardly assassination ! ”

“ An assassination ? No, England and France are at war, and to take advantage of an ambuscade to surprise and destroy an enemy is one of the recognised laws of warfare.”

Russell made no reply, but sat with his head bowed upon his breast for some time apparently absorbed in thought.

The Maltese seemed to be equally absorbed in thought. As they sat there in silence, the sound of carriage wheels was heard in the distance, followed by the cracking of the postilion's whip and the ring of horses' hoofs.

“ Five o'clock ! It must be he ! ” exclaimed the Englishman as he glanced at his watch.

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Both men darted to the window and saw a dusty cabriolet drawn by two horses stop in front of the post-house on the other side of the street, opposite the inn, and in another instant the Englishman turned livid with rage and cast a look of implacable hatred on the unsuspecting traveller.

“It is he! It is really he!”

“And he is alone,” added the Maltese, quickly.

“He is entering this very inn.”

“Everything favours us. He must have left his friend and companion in Dieppe. He is alone; there are two of us!”

“Can we still count upon the smuggler’s boat and assistance to-night?” suddenly inquired Russell. A new idea seemed to have struck him. A slight flush suffused his pale, cold face, and a spark of diabolical joy glittered in his eye, as he asked the question.

“Yes; for desiring to reserve a means of flight in case of need, I told him he might expect us.”

“Courage, then,” exclaimed Russell, ringing the bell, violently.

“What do you mean?” inquired the Maltese. “What do you intend to do?”

“You shall know, presently. Hush! here comes somebody.”

It was the innkeeper that had answered the summons.

“The breakfast was excellent, my friend,” said Russell. “How much do I owe you?”

“Six francs, including the room.”

“Here it is, and a present for the waiter, besides.”

“You are very honest, monsieur. I hope to be honoured with your patronage again.”

“You certainly will be. But tell me, I thought I heard post-horses just now. Has there been another arrival?”

“Yes, monsieur, another gentleman just came. I put him in the blue room overlooking the garden.”

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"He is one of your old patrons, probably, as a person who has been here once is sure to come back."

"Monsieur is very kind, I am sure, but it is the first time this traveller has ever stopped here."

"Is he travelling in style with a retinue of servants and all that, and is he going to remain long?"

"No, monsieur, only long enough to take a slight lunch. This is no rich nobleman. He is travelling alone, and looks and acts like a well-to-do tradesman. He hums tunes and drums upon the window-panes, and seems as gay as a peacock. He must be a very pleasant man."

"You seem to be a great physiognomist, mine host," responded the Englishman, with a sarcastic smile.

Then making a sign to his companion, he rose, remarking to the innkeeper as he did so :

"*Au revoir*, my friend. We are going to take a stroll around the town, and then return to Dieppe."

"If you would like to wait for the Paris diligence, it will pass through the town about eight o'clock this evening."

"Thanks, but though we are sailors, we are good walkers, and it is such a fine evening I think we won't wait for it."

CHAPTER VI.

A CUNNING SCHEME.

AFTER leaving the inn, the two strangers took themselves off for a quarter of an hour to decide upon their plans, then strolled like a couple of inquisitive idlers toward the post-station in front of which the traveller's carriage stood, nearly ready for departure, as the postilion was already putting fresh horses to it.

Captain Russell and his companion approached the vehicle, and, seating themselves upon one of the benches in front of the post-house, pretended to be examining the animals that were being harnessed, with a knowing eye.

"You have a horse there that seems to be as willing as he is handsome," Russell remarked to the postilion, after a few minutes' scrutiny.

"And he is as good as he looks, my friend," replied the postilion, pleased by the well-deserved praise bestowed upon his steed, "so I call him the Friar, and he is worthy of his name."

"He's a fine animal, there's no doubt of that. What a broad chest he has, and what powerful withers and flanks!"

"And what a beautiful head he has!" chimed in Pietri. "It is as delicate and intelligent as that of any Arabian steed."

"It is evident that you are both good judges of horse flesh, gentlemen, so you won't doubt my word when I

tell you that I can get over a mile or two of ground in the twinkling of an eye with the Friar and Sans-Culotte, as I call his mate."

"Yes, it must be a real pleasure to have a horse like that between one's legs, my worthy fellow. Though I'm a sailor, I've ridden horseback a good deal, but I never had the good fortune to bestride an animal like that."

"I can very readily believe that, monsieur; but this I know, you will never bestride a finer one."

"And it is too bad!"

"I don't see what you are going to do about it."

"Would you like to make forty francs, my friend?" inquired the Englishman, after a brief silence.

"Forty francs, I?" exclaimed the astonished postilion.

"Yes."

"But how the devil could I?"

"In the easiest way imaginable."

"Let me hear it."

Just as the Englishman was about to make known his proposition, a waiter from the inn crossed the street to tell the postilion that he need not be in a hurry, for the traveller would not be ready for some time.

"What is he doing? and why did he order his horses so long ahead, then?"

"I don't know anything about that, but I do know he's a queer one. What do you think he dined on? He drank milk instead of wine, and ate some poached eggs and panada."

"Panada? Well, he must be a queer one!" said Jean Pierre, scornfully. Then turning to Russell, "Come, friend, what were you going to tell me a few minutes ago about—"

"Step into the stable-yard, my good fellow, I want to say a few words to you."

"I can't leave the Friar; he would be sure to cut up some caper. He's always fussing with Sans-Culotte. Whoa, you rascal! See, he's beginning his antics now."

A CUNNING SCHEME.

Whoa, there ! if you break away, you brigand, I'll give you a beating you'll remember."

"Listen, then," said the Englishman, whispering a few words in the postilion's ear.

"What a funny idea!" exclaimed that young man, laughing.

"Will you accept my offer?"

"Really—"

"If you will, here are twenty francs. You shall have the rest when you get to the appointed place. After all, what risk do you run ? There is no harm in it."

"None in the world, but it is such a funny idea. It isn't the first time I've heard of the like, though. What do you think I saw in Dieppe the other day ? Those privateersmen — my ! how they make their money fly ! — did the queerest things ! I saw some of them offer twenty-five napoleons to an old sacristan to dress himself up like a woman in a furbelowed dress and a plumed hat and then drive about the town in a cab with them."

"What else could you expect, my good fellow ? Sailors are on shore too seldom not to amuse themselves according to their fancy, provided it doesn't injure anybody. You agree, don't you ?"

"Oh, well, it isn't worth while to have any scruples when one has to deal with a passenger who eats panada and doesn't drink wine, I admit, so — "

"So here are twenty francs," added Russell, slipping a gold piece into the postilion's hand. "You shall have as much more presently."

"All right, but make haste, for the place is a good league from here. Take the first road to the left."

A moment afterward the two strangers had disappeared.

About a quarter of an hour afterward, while the postilion was doing his best to restrain the gambols of

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the Friar and his mate, the proprietor of the Imperial Eagle appeared in the doorway and cried :

“ Mount, my boy, mount! Here comes the gentleman !”

“ The devil ! ” muttered Jean Pierre, climbing slowly into the saddle. “ My milk-drinker is in a dreadful hurry all of a sudden. I sha’n’t be able to get my horses there fast enough, now, I suppose.”

As he spoke, he guided his horses up to the door of the inn, and the traveller stepped into the vehicle. The landlord bowed respectfully to his patron, and as he closed the carriage door called out to the postilion :

“ Drive along, Jean Pierre, monsieur is in a hurry.”

“ You shall just fly along, monsieur,” replied Jean Pierre, cracking his whip noisily.

They traversed the town at a gallop and soon reached the highway, but they had gone only a couple of hundred yards when the postilion checked his horses abruptly, and, turning in his saddle, seemed to be waiting for something.

The traveller, surprised at this sudden stop, lowered one of the windows, and asked :

“ Well, what’s the matter ? ”

“ What’s the matter ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ I’ve no idea, I’m sure.”

“ You don’t know ? ”

“ I’m sure I don’t.”

“ But why did you stop ? ”

“ Because you called to me to stop.”

“ I did ? ”

“ Yes, and so I stopped.”

“ You are mistaken, I didn’t call you.”

“ Yes, you did, monsieur.”

“ But I tell you I didn’t. So go on, and try to make up for the time you have lost.”

“ You needn’t worry about that. I’ll drive like mad

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now. I don't mean there shall be a piece of the carriage left when we get to the next station."

And he again started his horses off at a gallop. But at the end of two hundred yards there was another sudden pause.

"What's the matter now?" demanded the traveller. "Is anything the matter with your harness?" he reiterated, seeing the postilion busying himself with his saddle-girth, uttering the most frightful oaths all the while.

There was no reply but another long string of furious imprecations, however.

"Is your horse disabled?"

Another string of oaths was the only answer.

"At least tell me what is the matter, my boy."

"Oh, never mind, monsieur, I've fixed everything all right now."

"Well, try to keep it all right, then."

"We shall fly along the road like birds, now, never fear, bourgeois," responded the youth, springing into the saddle and cracking his whip furiously.

The shades of night were falling, a few stars were already visible in the western horizon, but in the distance one could still dimly discern, by reason of the chalky character of the soil, a steep hill bordered by tall elm-trees.

The post-chaise flew swiftly along for about ten minutes, then the pace slackened, a trot succeeded the gallop, a walk succeeded the trot, and then the vehicle stopped short again.

This time Jean Pierre jumped down and examined one of the Friar's feet with great apparent solicitude.

"*Mille tonnerres!* one of my horses has gone lame!" he cried.

"Gone lame?" repeated the traveller, with unruffled calmness, though these numerous delays were certainly enough to try the patience of a saint. "Gone lame, did you say?"

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"Yes, frightfully lame," answered Jean Pierre, still holding up the horse's foot.

"But how did he happen to go lame so suddenly, my boy?"

"The devil take me if I know."

"Shall we have to stay here?"

"No, bourgeois, there's no danger of that. If I could only see what has made the horse go lame, but it is getting so dark —"

"Yes, and you must be sure not to forget to light the lanterns at our next stopping-place."

"Ah! I can feel what it is with my finger. There is a stone crowded in between the shoe and the frog. If I can only loosen it everything will be all right again."

"Try then, my boy, for really this is getting very tiresome," replied the still calm voice of the traveller.

Inwardly chuckling over the success of his ruse, the postilion continued to loudly curse the stone he was ostensibly endeavouring to remove, until he thought the two strangers must have had plenty of time to reach the appointed spot, after which he uttered a cry of triumph. "The accursed stone is out at last!" he exclaimed. "Now we shall just fly along again."

And again the vehicle started off at a rapid trot. Though night had really come now, thanks to the clearness of the air and the innumerable stars, it was not very dark. On reaching the foot of the hill the postilion stopped his panting horses, and, after springing to the ground, approached the carriage door, and said :

"This is such a steep hill, bourgeois, that I always walk up to make it easier for my horses."

"Very well, my boy," replied the occupant of the vehicle, tranquilly.

The postilion walked along beside his horses for a few seconds, then gradually slackened his pace, thus allowing them to get a short distance ahead of him. Just then, Russell and Pietri emerged from behind a

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clump of bushes on the roadside, and approached the postilion. The latter, as he walked along, had removed his braided jacket, red waistcoat, and topboots. The Englishman, who had likewise divested himself of his outer apparel, slipped on the jacket, plunged his feet into the high boots, and seized the hat, after which the postilion, smiling at what he considered an excellent joke, handed his whip to Russell, remarking :

“ It is too dark for the gentleman to see anything, so when you mount my horse I’ll get up on the rack behind, with your companion.”

“ Yes, and when we reach the next station I will get down, and you can put on your own clothes again, and I mine. And now here is the twenty francs I promised you.”

And slipping a gold piece in Jean Pierre’s hand, Russell quickened his pace, and, overtaking the horses about twenty yards from the top of the hill, began to walk along beside them.

It was now too dark for the traveller to perceive the substitution that had just been effected, but as the carriage reached the summit of the hill the occupant leaned out and said to the supposed postilion :

“ Don’t forget to put on the brake, my lad.”

“ I am going to do that now,” answered the pretended postilion, in a disguised voice.

Then slipping behind the vehicle, he said in a low tone to the Maltese and to Jean Pierre :

“ Get up behind and hold on tight. I’m going to put on the brake.”

The two men obeyed, while Russell rattled the chain of the brake, as if he were applying it to the wheel, but this was really only a pretence on his part ; then vaulting into the saddle, he dug his spurs into his horse’s flanks, and sent the carriage flying down the hill with frightful rapidity.

“ Good God ! we are lost, and the milk drinker in the

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bargain," exclaimed Jean Pierre hearing the chain of the brake dragging along on the ground. "Your friend failed to put the brake on, after all."

The Maltese, instead of answering the postilion, struck him such a violent blow on the head with the butt end of a pistol that Jean Pierre let go his hold on the rack and fell to the ground, while the carriage flew down the hill enveloped in a cloud of dust.

CHAPTER VII.

HOME PLEASURES.

SEVERAL days have passed since the traveller fell into the trap Captain Russell and his companion had set for him, and we must beg the reader to accompany us to a pretty cottage in the little village of Lionville, about four miles from Havre.

A bracing and salubrious climate, a country which is at the same time fertile and picturesque, fine trees, luxuriant turf, and a superb view of the ocean, make Lionville a veritable paradise to persons who love peace and quiet and opportunities for solitary meditation.

At that time, as in many other towns and villages, great and small, the absence of young men was particularly noticeable, the last wars of the Empire having summoned to the defence of the flag nearly all who were young and able-bodied, until a young man of twenty-five who had remained a civilian, unless he was a hunchback, or crippled, was almost as rare a phenomenon as the phœnix or a white crow.

Lionville possessed one of these rarities in the shape of a handsome young man not over twenty-four years of age, but we must make haste to say that he did not seem in the least inclined to take advantage of his position, for he led a very retired life, quite as much from preference as from any other reason.

This young man was one of the inmates of the pleasant, cheerful home to which we have already alluded, and several days after the traveller had been

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victimised by the pretended postilion a middle-aged woman, a young girl, and this young man (the phoenix referred to) were assembled one evening in a pretty, comfortably furnished drawing-room. A good fire was blazing on the hearth, for the evenings were still cool, and a shaded lamp diffused a soft light through the apartment, while the tea-kettle, standing in front of the fire, bubbled softly.

A close observer would perhaps have noticed that most of the ornaments and articles of luxury were of English origin, in spite of the stern prohibition against the importation of English goods which then prevailed on the continent. The same might be said of the handsome silver tea-service, no two pieces of which were alike, however, a ducal coronet surmounting the massive hot-water urn and a knight's crest adorning the teapot, while an unpretending initial was engraved upon the sugar-bowl, though it was none the less brilliant on that account.

The middle-aged woman had a frank, intelligent, cheerful face. She was at least forty-two years old, but her hair was still black, her complexion fresh, her teeth white, and her eyes bright; in short, this worthy dame still attracted plenty of admiring glances when, arrayed in a handsome bonnet of English lace, a gown of English tissue, and a Paisley shawl of the finest texture, she accompanied her youthful charge to the village church.

The young girl in question was seventeen, tall, slender, extremely delicate in appearance, and endowed or rather afflicted with an extremely nervous and impressionable temperament. This extreme sensibility or susceptibility was at least partially due to, or perhaps we should say, had been greatly aggravated by a terrible event which occurred many years before, and which had had the effect of rendering her excessively timid. It would be difficult to find a more pleasing and attractive face than hers, however, and when, yielding to the uncontrollable

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fear which the most trivial incident sometimes excited, she arched her slender neck, and listened pantingly, breathlessly, with her graceful attitude and large wondering, frightened eyes, she reminded one of a startled gazelle. By reason of this nervous and extremely sensitive temperament, probably, the young girl had not the brilliant colouring of sturdy health, but was usually very pale, though every passing emotion brought a delicate rose tint to her cheek, and then her charming face, framed in a wealth of bright chestnut hair, seemed radiant with the glowing beauty of youth. True, with a more vivid colouring and fuller contour, she might have been much more attractive to many persons, but much of the charm of her expressive features and delicate loveliness would have been lost.

The last of the three persons assembled in the cosy parlour was the phoenix to whom allusion has been made, that is to say, a handsome young man who had not been summoned to the defence of the flag.

This phoenix was twenty-five years old, of medium height, slender, but admirably formed, with a frank expression and regular features, though a tinge of slightly deprecating embarrassment was apparent both in his face and manner, the result of the infirmity which had exempted him from military service. In short, the young man's sight was very poor, so poor, indeed, that he could scarcely see to move about; besides, by reason of some organic peculiarity, he could derive no assistance from glasses, and though his large brown eyes were clear and well-shaped, there was something vague and uncertain in their gaze, and sometimes when the poor myope, after having turned quickly, as if to look at you, remembered, alas! with bitter sadness, that three yards from him every person and object became unrecognisable, the expression of his face was almost heartrending.

Still, it must be admitted that the consequences of

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the young man's infirmity were sometimes so amusing as to excite mirth rather than compassion ; and it is needless to say that the middle-aged lady was keenly alive to all that was ludicrous in her youthful relative's blunders—for the relationship existing between them was that of nephew and aunt,—while the young girl, on the contrary, seemed to sympathise deeply with the oftentimes painful position of the half-blind man.

The young girl was embroidering, and her governess or housekeeper knitting, while the young man, with the last issue of the *Journal of the Empire* held close to his eyes, was reading the latest news aloud, and informing his readers of the Duc de Reggio's departure to take command of the army.

The housekeeper, hearing a brisk bubbling sound accompanied with several little jets of steam from the kettle, said to her nephew :

"The water is boiling, Onésime. Pour some into the urn, but pray be careful."

Onésime laid his paper on the table, rose, and started toward the hearth with dire misgivings which were more than justified. He knew, alas ! that his path was full of snares and pitfalls, for there was an armchair standing on his left to be avoided, then a small round table to the right of him, and this Scylla and Charybdis avoided, he had to step over a small footstool near the hearth before he could seize the boiling kettle. Consequently, one can easily understand the extreme prudence with which Onésime started on his mission. One outstretched hand warning him of the close proximity of the armchair on his left, he avoided that obstacle, but he was almost on the point of running against the table before his other hand discovered danger of a second shipwreck, and he was inwardly rejoicing at having reached the fireplace without mishap, when he stumbled over the footstool. In his efforts to regain his equilibrium he took a step or two backwards, and,

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coming in violent contact with the table, overturned it with a loud crash.

For several minutes the young girl had been absorbed in a profound reverie. Rudely awakened from it by the noise made by the falling table, ignorant of the cause of the commotion, and unable to overcome her fear, she uttered a cry of terror and sank back in her chair, trembling like a leaf.

"Don't be frightened, my dear," cried the house-keeper. "It is another of Onésime's escapades, that is all. Calm yourself, my child."

The young girl, on discovering the cause of the commotion, deeply regretted having increased her unfortunate friend's embarrassment, so, striving to overcome the nervous trembling that had seized her, she said :

"Forgive me, my dear friend. How silly I am, but you know I never seem to be able to conquer this absurd nervousness."

"Poor child, it is no fault of yours! Are you not the one who suffers most from it? Surely there is no necessity for apologising to us, especially as but for my nephew's awkwardness —"

"No, no, I am the culprit," interrupted the young girl. "To be so childish at my age is disgraceful."

The unfortunate young man, distressed beyond measure at his mishap, stammered a few incoherent words of apology, then set the table on its feet again, shoved the footstool aside, and, seizing the teakettle, started to pour the water into the urn, when his aunt exclaimed :

"Don't attempt that, for Heaven's sake! You are so awkward, you will be sure to make a mess of it."

Onésime, deeply mortified and anxious to atone for his former blunder, persisted, nevertheless, and, lifting the cover of the urn, began to pour the water from the kettle with his right hand, while his left rested on the edge of the table. But unfortunately his eyes played him false as usual, and he began pouring the contents

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of the teakettle down one side of the urn, instead of into the opening, covering his left hand with boiling water and burning it frightfully.

He manifested a truly heroic stoicism, however. But for the slight start caused by the sudden and intense suffering, he gave no sign, and, conscious now of the mistake he had made, finally managed to fill the urn, after which he said, gently :

“ The urn is filled, aunt. Shall I make the tea ? Mademoiselle will take a cup, perhaps.”

“ What ! you have actually filled the urn without any fresh catastrophe ? You really ought to have a leather medal, my dear,” laughed his aunt.

“ Don’t pay any attention to what she says, M. Onésime,” interposed the young girl. “ Your aunt takes such delight in teasing you that I feel it my duty to come to your assistance. And now will you be kind enough to give me a cup of tea ? ”

“ No, no, don’t you dare to think of such a thing ! ” exclaimed the housekeeper, laughing. “ You will be sure to break one of these pretty pink and white cups monsieur brought us the last time he came home.”

But Onésime gave the lie to his aunt’s gloomy prognostications, by bringing the cup of tea to the young girl without spilling a drop, and was rewarded by a gentle “ Thank you, M. Onésime,” accompanied with her sweetest smile. But the sad, almost imploring expression in the young man’s eyes, as he turned toward her, touched her deeply.

“ Alas ! ” she said to herself, “ he does not even see that I am smiling at him. He always seems to be asking you to have patience with his infirmity.”

This thought grieved her so much that the older woman noticed the fact, and asked :

“ What is the matter, my child ? You look sad.”

Hearing his aunt’s words, Onésime turned anxiously to the young girl, as if trying to read the expression of

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her face, while she, embarrassed by the housekeeper's remark, answered :

" You are mistaken, I am not in the least sad ; but just now when you spoke of my father it reminded me that he ought to have reached home several days ago."

" Surely you are not going to torment yourself about that, my child. Is this the first time your father has failed to arrive at the appointed time ? "

" It worries me, nevertheless."

" Dear me ! There isn't the slightest doubt that business has detained him. Do you suppose that a man who acts as the business agent of a number of big factories can tell the exact hour at which he will be able to return home ? An opportunity to make a large sale sometimes presents itself just as he is about to start, and he is obliged to remain. Only a couple of months ago, just before he went away, he said to me : ' I am determined my daughter shall be rich. A couple more trips like the last, and I will never leave the dear child again.' "

" Heaven grant that time may soon come," sighed the girl. " I should be tranquil and happy if my kind and loving father were always with me. You are tormented by so many fears when one you love is absent from you."

" Fears ! fears about what, I should like to know ! What risk can a quiet merchant like monsieur run ? A merchant who doesn't meddle with other people's affairs, but travels about from town to town in a post-chaise, to sell his goods. What risk does a man like that run ? Besides, he travels only in the daytime, and always has his clerk with him, and you know he would go through fire and water for your father, though he really does seem to be the most unfortunate of mortals."

" That is true. Poor man ! some accident seems to befall him every time he travels with my father."

" Yes, and why ? Simply because he is the most

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meddlesome old creature that ever lived, and the awkwardest. Still, that doesn't prevent him from being a great protection to monsieur if any one should attempt to molest him. So what have you to fear, my child?"

"Nothing."

"Think how you would feel if you had a father in the army as so many girls have."

"I could never stand such a terrible strain as that. Why, to be always thinking that my father was exposed to danger, to death,—why, the mere idea of such a thing is appalling."

"Yes, my poor child, the mere idea of such a thing makes you as pale as a ghost, and sets you to trembling like a leaf. It does not surprise me, though, for I know how devoted you are to your father. But drive these dreadful thoughts from your mind, and, by the way, suppose Onésime finishes reading the paper to us."

"Certainly, if M. Onésime is not too tired."

"No, mademoiselle," replied the young man, making almost superhuman efforts to conceal his suffering, which was becoming more and more intolerable.

And getting the paper as close to his eyes as possible, he was preparing to resume the reading, when he remarked :

"I think this is an article which is likely to interest mademoiselle."

"What is it about?"

"It describes the exploits of that famous Dieppe privateer, of whom everybody is talking."

"I fear the article will be too exciting for you to-day, my dear, you seem to be so nervous," remarked the housekeeper.

"Is it such a very blood-curdling story, M. Onésime?" inquired the girl, smiling.

"I think not, mademoiselle, judging from the title. The article is headed: 'Remarkable Escape of the Brave

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Captain l'Endurci, Who Was Abducted from French Soil by English Emissaries.' "

" It must be very interesting. Pray read it, monsieur."

So the young man at once began to read the following account of the brave captain's escape.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CAPTAIN'S NARRATIVE.

"ALL France is familiar with the name and heroic valour of Captain l'Endurci, commander of the privateer *Hell-hound*, as well as the large number of prizes which the gallant captain has recently captured from the English.

"Only a few days ago Captain l'Endurci returned to Dieppe, with a large three-master belonging to the East India Company, and armed with thirty guns, in tow, while the *Hell-hound* can boast of only sixteen. This three-master, which was convoying several merchant vessels loaded with wheat, had, together with her convoy, been captured by the intrepid captain, after a desperate fight of three hours, in which nearly or quite one-half of the French crew had been killed or wounded.

"The gallant captain's entrance into the port of Dieppe was a veritable triumph. The entire population of the town assembled upon the piers, and when the brig, black with powder and riddled with shot, sailed slowly in with her prizes, shouts of the wildest enthusiasm rent the air, but the brave captain's triumph became an ovation when the people learned that the vessels which the three-master was convoying were laden with wheat. At a time when grain is so appallingly scarce in France, such a capture is a national benefaction, and when the people discovered that Captain l'Endurci, being aware of the speedy arrival of these vessels, had spent several days

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lying in wait for them, allowing richer and less dangerous prizes to pass unmolested, all Dieppe went wild."

"How grand!" exclaimed the housekeeper, enthusiastically. "Ah, I would give ten years of my life to be the mother or sister of such a hero."

"And I, my friend, deem myself a thousand times more fortunate in being the daughter of an honest merchant, instead of having some bloodthirsty hero for a father," remarked Sabine.

"What a strange child you are! Wouldn't you feel proud to be able to say: 'That famous man is my father?'"

"Not by any means. If he were absent, I should be always trembling to think of the danger he might be in; if he were with me, I should always be imagining I saw blood on his hands."

"Such ideas seem very strange to me, for I love heroes, myself," said the older woman, gaily. "But go on, Onésime, I am anxious to hear how this valiant captain could have been kidnapped on French soil." Then, noticing that her nephew was unusually pale, and that big drops of perspiration were standing on his brow, she asked:

"What is the matter, Onésime? You seem to be suffering."

"No, indeed, aunt," replied the young man, enraged at himself for not being able to conceal the agony his burn was causing him. "Now listen to the rest of the story.

"Captain l'Endurci, after a three day's sojourn in Dieppe, started for Paris, unfortunately leaving his head gunner, one of his oldest comrades-in-arms, who was seriously wounded in the last engagement, in Dieppe to attend to some business matters.

"It was between the second and the third post-stations on his route that this audacious attack was made upon the captain, evidently by English emissaries

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who had been lying in wait for him. It seems that these emissaries had taken advantage of the postilion's credulity to persuade him to allow one of them to take his place and drive the vehicle for awhile. This change of drivers was made while ascending a steep hill, where the progress of the vehicle was necessarily slow, but the Englishman was scarcely in the saddle before he started the horses off at a frightful pace, while the postilion was hurled half-dead upon the ground by the other Englishman, who was clinging to the back of the post-chaise.

"The captain astonished at the terrific speed with which the horses were tearing down the steep descent, thought that the postilion had neglected to put on the brake, and had lost all control of the horses; but soon the rate of speed diminished perceptibly, though the vehicle continued to fly swiftly along.

"The night having become very dark, the captain could not see that the carriage, instead of following the main road, was going in an entirely different direction. Not having the slightest suspicion of this fact, and ignorant of the change of postilions, the captain rode on in this way about an hour and a half, and finally fell asleep.

"The sudden stopping of the carriage woke him, and supposing that he had reached the next relay station, and seeing two or three lanterns flitting about, he was unsuspectingly alighting from the vehicle, when several men suddenly rushed upon him, and, before he had time to offer the slightest resistance, he was securely bound and gagged, and dragged down to the beach on the outskirts of the little seaport town of Hosey, about fifteen miles from Dieppe, and known as the headquarters of a daring gang of smugglers. Here, the captain, who was unable to make the slightest movement or utter a word, was hustled aboard a fishing-smack, and a few minutes afterward, wind and tide both being favourable, the little vessel set sail for England.

"But Captain l'Endurci is not the man to tamely sub-





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mit to defeat, as the following extract from that gentleman's letter to a friend in this city conclusively proves.

“ He writes as follows :

“ ‘ When I found myself a prisoner in the hold, my rage at the cowardly trick which had been played upon me became ungovernable. I had been thrown upon a few pieces of old sail in the hold, with my legs securely bound together with a long piece of rope as big as my thumb, and with my hands tied behind my back. I tried by stooping to reach with my teeth the rope that bound my legs, but found it impossible. I knew by the motion of the boat that a strong wind was blowing, and that we were heading straight for the shores of England.

“ ‘ I knew the fate that awaited me there. A few words that had passed between my captors had enlightened me. Instead of killing me outright, they wanted to see me lead a life of torture in the hulks. One of them had even spoken of exposing me to the jeers and insults of the populace for several days.

“ ‘ The mere thought of such a thing nearly drove me mad, and in a paroxysm of fury I sank back on the old sails, foaming with rage. This ebullition over, anger as usual gave me new strength. My blood boiled in my veins, then, mounting to my brain, gave birth to a thousand projects, each one more audacious than the other, and I felt both my physical and mental vigour increased a hundredfold by this effervescent condition of all my vital powers.

“ ‘ I finally decided upon one of the plans that this paroxysm of rage had suggested to me. In any other frame of mind, it would have seemed utterly impracticable to me, and I believe it would have seemed so to any man who was not half frenzied by a spirit of anger,—anger, that dread and powerful divinity, as the Indian poet says.’ ”

For some time the young girl who sat listening had seemed to be a prey to a painful preoccupation;

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several times she had started impatiently as if anxious to escape from some harrowing thought, and now suddenly interrupting the reading in spite of herself, as it were, she exclaimed :

“That man makes me shudder !”

“And why ?” demanded the housekeeper. “This brave sailor seems to me as brave as a lion.”

“But what a man of iron !” exclaimed the girl, more and more excitedly. “How violent he is ! And to think that any person should dare to excuse and even glorify anger when it is so horrible — so unspeakably horrible !”

The housekeeper, without attaching much importance to the girl’s protest, however, replied :

“Nonsense, my child ! You say that anger is so terrible. That depends,—for if anger suggested to the captain a way and means of escape from these treacherous Englishmen, he is perfectly right to glorify it, and I, in his place— But good Heavens !” she exclaimed, seeing the girl turn alarmingly pale and close her eyes as if she were about to swoon. “Good Heavens, what is the matter with you ? Your lips are quivering. You are crying. You do not answer me, — speak, what is the matter ?”

But the words failed to reach the ears of the poor child. With her large eyes distended with terror and bewilderment, she indicated with a gesture some apparition which existed only in her disordered imagination, and murmured, wildly :

“The man in black ! Oh, the man in black ! There he is now ! Don’t you see him ?”

“Calm yourself ! Don’t allow yourself to think any more about that, in Heaven’s name. Don’t you know how hurtful such thoughts are to you ?”

“Oh, that man ! He was equally terrible in his rage, when — It was years and years ago, and I was little more than a baby, but I can see him yet, in his strange, sombre costume of black and white like the livery of the

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dead. It was night, and my father was absent from home when this man gained an entrance into our house, I know not how. I had never seen him before. He threatened my mother, who was holding me in her arms. ‘At least spare my child!’ she sobbed. I remember it well. But he only exclaimed, still advancing threateningly upon my mother, ‘Don’t you know that I am capable of anything in my anger?’ And then he rushed out of the room. Oh, my mother, my mother dead, and I —”

The girl could say no more, for she was relapsing into one of the nervous spasms which this terrible recollection almost always caused, — this recollection of a deplorable occurrence from which her condition of morbid susceptibility seemed to have dated.

This crisis soon abated, thanks to the judicious attentions of the housekeeper, who was, alas! only too used to rendering them. When she was herself again, the young girl, whose character was a singular compound of weakness and firmness, thought with shame and regret of the lack of self-control she had displayed while this account of the corsair’s escape was being read, an account which, strange to say, had an inexplicable fascination for her, inspiring her at the same time with horror and a sort of morbid curiosity; so, in spite of Onésime’s entreaties, she insisted that he should continue the reading so unfortunately interrupted.

The housekeeper, noting this insistence, and fearing that any opposition might react very dangerously upon the girl’s excitable nature just at this time, also requested Onésime to continue the account of Captain l’Endurci’s escape.

CHAPTER IX.

CONCLUSION OF THE CAPTAIN'S NARRATIVE.

THE rest of the captain's letter read as follows:

“‘ In order to carry out my plan, the first thing I had to do was to free myself from my bonds. Being unable to reach them with my mouth so I could gnaw them in two with my teeth, I devised another means. By crawling about on my stomach and feeling around with my face — as I had no use of my hands — I finally succeeded in discovering a large iron hook, doubtless intended for holding the ballast in place. Approaching this hook, I leaned my back against it and began to rub the ropes that bound me across the iron and upon the sharp end of the hook. Two hours afterward I had worn the ropes sufficiently thin to be able to sever them by a powerful wrench, anger having endowed me with almost supernatural strength.

“‘ My hands free, the rest was only child’s play.

“‘ I had my tinder-box, my pipe, a package of tobacco, and a long whaling-knife in my pocket. In the twinkling of an eye I had cut the ropes that bound my legs and started on a tour of inspection through the hold on my hands and knees, as it was too low to admit of my standing upright.

“‘ I could find nothing but some scraps of old sail and a few pieces of rope. The only means of egress was a square hatchway. The boards of which this was made had separated a little in one place, and I could see the moonlight through the opening. Placing my hands upon

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my knees and making my body into a bow, I tried to force open the hatchway with my shoulders, but in vain. It was evidently secured — as it should have been — with two strong iron bars.

“Taking some of the ends of rope, I cut them into small pieces, untwisted the strands, and in this way soon collected a small pile of tow. Afterward I cut some of the old canvas on which I had been lying into narrow strips and laid them on the little pile of tow, which I had placed directly under the hatchway ; after which I emptied my little bag of tobacco on it to make it more combustible, and set fire to it, blowing it vigorously all the while.

“The tow took fire, communicated it to the pieces of old sail, and an instant afterward the hold was filled with a dense smoke, part of which filtered through the opening in the hatchway, while I yelled “Fire !” with all my might. My cries and the strong smell of smoke that escaped through the hatchway frightened the men on deck. I heard a great commotion up there, the hatchway was raised almost immediately, and the thick cloud of smoke that poured out through the opening was so blinding that I was able to make my way through it, unseen, to the deck, with a single bound, knife in hand. I found myself face to face with a tall, swarthy man. I plunged my knife into his heart. He fell backward into the sea. Leaping for the axe which is always kept near the bitt, so the rigging can be quickly cut away if need be, I struck down another man ; then, with a back stroke, nearly cut off the arm of a man who was rushing upon me, sabre in hand. All this occurred almost in the twinkling of an eye. Taking advantage of the sort of stupor that had seized the crew, and feeling much calmer after this explosion of long-suppressed rage, I could see better where I was, or take my bearings a little, as the saying is.

“It was a magnificent moonlight night; a strong

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breeze was blowing ; an old, white-haired sailor was at the helm ; a cabin-boy and three terrified sailors had taken refuge in the bow, separated from me by the open hatchway. The man I had struck down with the axe did not move ; the one I had wounded was on his knees, holding his right arm in his left hand.

“ ‘ I still had three able-bodied men, a boy, and an old man to contend with, but they all seemed to be demoralised by my sudden attack.

“ ‘ Just then I caught sight of a pair of pistols near the rudder, and before either of the three sailors could make the slightest movement, I jumped for these weapons. In another moment my two bullets had struck down a man apiece. With me at the helm, and the old sailor and the boy to assist me, the boat could be handled with little or no difficulty, for the weather was superb, and we could not be more than fourteen or fifteen miles from the shores of France.

“ ‘ My situation thus promptly defined, I loaded my pistols again and advanced toward the three men, who were gradually recovering from their surprise.

“ ‘ “ Go down into the hold, all three of you,” I thundered. “ If you don’t, I’ll shoot two of you, and hew down the other.”

“ ‘ There was only the length of the hatchway — about four feet — between me and these men, so I could easily blow their brains out. They instantly jumped into the hold, where the small quantity of combustible material I had lighted was now nearly burned out. The wounded man, too, staggered down as best he could ; I replaced the hatchway, securing it with the iron bars as before ; then I walked to the stern of the boat.

“ ‘ “ Give me the helm,” I said to the old sailor ; “ you and the boy are to manage the sail, and manage it right, or I’ll blow your brains out.”

“ ‘ As I took the rudder out of his hand, he recoiled a step and exclaimed :

CONCLUSION OF CAPTAIN'S NARRATIVE.

“““ It is Captain l'Endurei, as I live ! ”

“““ You know me, then ? ”

“““ Know you, captain ! I made two voyages with you on the *Hell-hound*. ”

“““ And your name ? ”

“““ Simon from Dunkirk. ”

“““ I remember you now. So you intended to deliver me, your old captain, into the hands of the English, did you ? ”

“““ May I be shot if I suspected for a single instant that it was you, captain. ”

“““ So this smack belongs to you, I suppose. ”

“““ No, captain, to Bezelek. ”

“““ And where is he ? ”

“““ At the bottom of the sea. He was the man that you killed first and that fell overboard. ”

“““ But how does it happen that you consented to have a hand in my abduction ? ”

“““ Well, captain, we've been doing a little smuggling. ”

“““ That is very apparent. ”

“““ And night before last two men came to us,— that is one of them lying there now. ”

“““ He pointed to the dead man in the bow as he spoke. ”

“““ Throw him into the sea, ” I said, curtly.

“““ And the other man ? ” I inquired, as soon as this order had been obeyed.

“““ He is down in the hold. He is the man you wounded in the arm. ”

“““ And how did these men induce you and Bezelek to become their accomplices ? ”

“““ They said : ‘ Bezelek, there are fifty guineas ready for you if you will consent to take a man we will bring to you to England. We do not intend to injure him in any way ; but if he resists, you and your men will be expected to lend a hand in gagging and binding him, and placing him in the hold of your fishing-smack. You will be paid twenty-five guineas in advance, and

twenty-five more on your arrival at Folkestone.' As there seemed to be no great harm in the proceeding, the offer tempted Bezelek and he agreed to do what the men asked. But I swear that I had no idea it was you. If I had, I would never have had anything to do with the affair."

"Four hours after I escaped from the hold we were within sight of the port of Mora, where I landed safe and sound.'

"Our readers will, we are sure, feel grateful to us," added the *Journal of the Empire*, "for having given them this extract from the brave privateer's letter. Thanks be to God, Captain l'Endurci, by his coolness and courage, succeeded in escaping this most infamous conspiracy against him. Let us hope that his name will long remain a terror to the enemies of France."

The article concluded, Onésime laid the paper on the table.

"What a wonderful man this corsair must be!" exclaimed the housekeeper, admiringly. "Alone, bound and gagged, he nevertheless found a way to escape his imminent danger."

"But what a quantity of blood he had to shed!" exclaimed the girl, shuddering. "And not a single word of regret or of pity for his victims. With what cruel indifference he speaks of the men he killed in cold blood; for thus taken by surprise, the poor creatures could offer no resistance."

"That is true," murmured Onésime.

But his aunt did not even hear him, for, turning to the girl, she exclaimed, warmly :

"It is very easy to talk, my child, but in such a position one certainly has a right —"

"Ah, yes, my dear, you are probably going to say that this man was the victim of the vilest treachery,— that he had an undoubted right to recover his liberty at any

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cost, and that his ferocious disregard of the lives of others is what people call courage and heroism. All this is very possible. I am a poor judge, perhaps. I only tell you how it impresses me. This account of his exploits excites only horror and aversion in me."

"But a corsair is a corsair, my child. You certainly don't expect him to be a saint. Each man according to his trade."

"It is an executioner's business to behead people, aunt, but that makes his trade none the less horrible," exclaimed Onésime.

"Ah, I felt sure M. Onésime would feel as I do about it," said the girl, quickly.

"He? oh, yes, I don't doubt it! He is a regular sissy. When did you ever hear of his doing any fighting?"

"I admit that I am no hero, aunt," replied Onésime, smiling, "I don't doubt in the least that if I were a prisoner, and obliged to kill somebody to regain my liberty, I should remain a prisoner."

"Yours is the truest, noblest kind of courage, after all," responded the young girl, warmly, for her dislike of warriors in general was perhaps due in a great measure to the fact that Onésime, both by reason of his temperament and his infirmity, was never likely to be a man of that kind.

"Onésime courageous!" retorted the housekeeper. "You must be jesting!" Then, turning to her nephew, she cried: "Don't you see that mademoiselle is making fun of you, my poor boy? Oh, well, put my knitting on the table for me, my brave hero, and hand me my workbox without dropping it if you can."

The young man was consequently obliged to hold out both his hands in turn, one to present the work-box, the other to take the knitting, and as the light from the lamp fell full on the table, the pitiless aunt instantly discovered the terrible burn he had received.

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"Good Heavens! what is the matter with your hand?" she exclaimed.

"Nothing of any consequence, aunt," he replied, hastily drawing back his hand, while the young girl, whose attention had been attracted by the housekeeper's exclamation, turned toward him anxiously.

But the aunt sprang up, and, seizing her nephew's hand in spite of his efforts to hide it, examined it carefully.

"It is frightfully burned, frightfully!" she cried. "Why, you must be suffering agony with it. It was just done. How did it happen? I know. It was when you poured the boiling water in the urn, and, for fear we would laugh at you, you endured the terrible pain without a word. You even had the courage to go on reading all this time just as if nothing had happened."

"Ah, I told you that he was brave," exclaimed the young girl. "His is the true courage, after all,—not the ferocious courage born of anger, that seeks only to destroy, but the courage of noble hearts who, for fear of alarming those whom they love, endure the most intense suffering without so much as a sign."

The girl's emotion repaid the young man a thousand-fold for his suffering; he even had the happiness of seeing the touching expression of her features, too, this time, as she would insist upon assisting the housekeeper in dressing Onésime's hand.

This work had just been completed, and Onésime was regretting that he had only one burn, when the door of the little parlour was suddenly thrown open, and a servant rushed in, exclaiming:

"Dame Roberts, Dame Roberts, M. Segoffin has come!"

"And my father,—my father has come too, has he not?" exclaimed the girl, her face radiant with joy.

"No, mademoiselle, M. Segoffin says monsieur was

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detained at the post-office by some letters, but that he will be here almost immediately."

The girl hastened out of the room to prepare to meet her father. As the door closed behind her, Dame Roberts turned to her nephew and said:

"Go up to your room now, Onésime. I will see you before I go to bed and tell you what M. Cloarek says in relation to you, for he must know why I took you into his house in his absence, though I know his kindness of heart well enough to feel sure that he will approve of what I have done."

So Onésime went up to his room oppressed by a vague uneasiness. He had scarcely left the parlour, when M. Segoffin entered it.

CHAPTER X.

SEGOFFIN'S DISSIMULATION.

IT would be far from complimentary to the reader's penetration to suppose that he had not long since recognised in Onésime's defender Mlle. Cloarek, who lost her mother at the age of five years, in consequence of a nervous shock. We trust, too, that the reader's penetration has served him equally well in the case of Suzanne Roberts, Sabine's former nurse, and Madame Cloarek's confidential attendant and housekeeper, and likewise in the case of Captain l'Endurci and his brave head gunner.

Twelve years have elapsed since we last saw Segoffin, and he is little changed in appearance. He looks as much like a clown as ever, the only modifications which time, or rather events, have made in his grotesquely grave features being, first, a deep scar beginning at the left temple, and extending to the bottom of the cheek (a wound caused, as he affirmed, by an unfortunate fall upon a piece of broken glass).

Second, the recent loss of an eye, an unfortunate loss indicated by a large black patch, and caused, no doubt, by some similar mishap.

In spite of these rather grave injuries to his personal charms, M. Segoffin held his head as high as ever. A long white cravat, decorated with bright red polka dots, encircled his throat; his long redingote and knee-breeches were of the finest brown broadcloth, and his

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black stockings were of silk. In his right hand, from which two fingers were missing,—two fingers carelessly lost, as he declared, from having been caught in a piece of machinery,—he carried a heavy cane, for he was quite lame now, in consequence of another accident,—at least, so he said.

On seeing Segoffin, Dame Roberts, in spite of the taunts with which she had pursued him for so many years, made no attempt to conceal her pleasure. In the delight his return caused her, she did not notice, at first, that Segoffin was all the while endeavouring to present only his profile, or as nearly a three-quarter view of his face as possible, to the object of his affections. The fact is, he wished to defer the explanation of the recent loss of his eye until the latest possible moment, but the lady, on going a little closer to him, noticed the disfiguring patch, and exclaimed :

“ Good Heavens! what is the matter with your eye, Segoffin ? ”

“ Which eye ? ”

“ Why, your right eye.”

“ My right eye ? ”

“ Yes. Why do you wear that big black patch over it ? ”

“ I know.” .

“ I should suppose that you did. As for me, I am afraid to guess what the matter is.”

“ Nonsense ! guess away.”

“ You have lost an eye.”

“ There is no undoing that which is done.”

“ I declare, since monsieur went into business and took you for his clerk, there is many a soldier at the Invalides that isn’t half as much battered up as you are. How on earth did you lose your eye ? ”

“ The fact is, my sight has been failing for some time past, so I decided to put on spectacles. I went to purchase a pair. It was at Lyons. Ah, that rascally

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optician!" exclaimed Segoffin, shaking his fist in a sort of retrospective rage.

"Calm yourself, Segoffin, and go on with your story."

"It was a splendid day, and the optician's shop stood in a blaze of sunlight on the Quai du Rhone, my dear,—in a blaze of sunlight, remember that."

"What difference does that make?"

"A vast amount of difference. I asked to try some spectacles. The scoundrel handed me a pair. I put them on my nose. Just at that moment loud screams were heard on the quay, and curiosity naturally caused me to run to the door."

"Of course."

"I ran to the door, I say, with the spectacles still on my nose, and I was looking all around, first to the right, then to the left, to see where the cries came from, when, happening to look up, I had very much the same feeling in my right eye as if the ball had been pierced by a red-hot iron."

"Good Heavens! what caused it?"

"One of the glasses in the pair which the optician had given me was of great magnifying power," replied Segoffin, "and when I looked up and the noonday sun shone full on my glasses, it converted the lens I speak of into a sort of burning-glass. My eye was burned out. You could positively hear it sizzle."

"Is it possible?" exclaimed Dame Roberts. "Did you really lose your eye in that way?"

"There is no undoing that which is done. But I will say this much, since I have had but one eye that one has been doing the work of two in the most remarkable manner. I have the eyes or rather the eye of fifteen, so to me you look as handsome, as handsome as if you were fifteen, my dear."

"I have no such juvenile eyes, my poor Segoffin, so I see you exactly as you are. I certainly regret the

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accident exceedingly, and I truly hope this will be the last. Did monsieur have a satisfactory trip, and is he well?"

"Perfectly."

"And his fits of despondency when he thinks of madame's death?"

"He has them still. He shuts himself up alone for several hours, and when he appears again one can see that he has been weeping."

"And his disposition?"

"I am a regular firebrand in comparison."

"Then he evinces no more temper while travelling than he does here?"

"Not a bit more."

"And really when one remembers what monsieur was a dozen years ago, Segoffin!"

"There is as much difference as there is between day and night."

"That reminds me that Mlle. Sabine had another of her nervous attacks to-day, when something reminded her of her poor mother's death. How fortunate it is that she did not recognise monsieur in his Breton costume on that terrible night. The poor child still believes that it was a stranger who killed her mother."

"And she must never be allowed to suspect anything to the contrary."

"The complete change in monsieur's character makes that a comparatively easy matter."

"All the effect of a business career. When monsieur lost his position after poor madame's death, he said to himself: 'I have barely enough to support my daughter for a few years. I was evidently not intended for a judicial career. I have a taste for commerce, so I will try commerce.' And a very wise decision it has proved on his part, for he has not only accumulated a handsome fortune for his daughter, but transformed himself into the most lamb-like of men, and you have commerce to

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thank for it all ; for you must see for yourself that if a merchant went about beating his customers over the head and kicking them in the stomach, he wouldn't make many sales."

" You are and always will be the same exasperating creature, Segoffin ! " exclaimed the housekeeper, impatiently. " Years of travel and business have made no change in you, mentally, understand ; physically — it is different — "

" Hold, my ungrateful friend," said Segoffin, drawing a peculiarly shaped box from his pocket, and gallantly offering it to Suzanne. " This is the way in which I avenge myself for your abuse."

" What is it, Segoffin ? "

" Some little tokens of friendly regard, for you know that in your secret heart you are really very fond of me."

But as the housekeeper opened the box, and unfolded a piece of paper in which the present was wrapped, she recoiled almost in terror.

" The paper is burnt at one end, and stained with blood at the other," she exclaimed, in dismay.

" Oh, yes," replied M. Cloarek's clerk, imperturbably, " it is a piece of — no matter what, that I used to light my candle with, and when I was wrapping the pin and the earrings up, I pricked my finger,— awkward as usual, you see."

The housekeeper took out a pair of enormous gold earrings, and a large gold pin ornamented with an anchor surmounted by a crown. We will here add, for the information of the reader, that in those days sailors in the royal navy of England still wore earrings, and fastened their woollen shirts with large gold or silver pins.

The housekeeper, more grateful for the kindly feeling than for the present itself, as she had no intention of dragging down her ears with these rings, fastened the pin in her dress.

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"Really, you are too kind," she said. "These earrings and this pin, especially, are in perfect taste, and as we live so near the sea the selection of a pin surmounted with an anchor is extremely appropriate. But here, M. Traveller," continued Suzanne, taking the red worsted comforter she had been knitting from the table, "you see you are not the only person who thinks of the absent."

"What, Suzanne, this comforter —"

"Is intended to keep you warm and comfortable in the winter."

"Ah, Suzanne, Suzanne, I shall never forget —"

But Segoffin's protestations of gratitude were, unfortunately, interrupted by the entrance of M. Cloarek and his daughter, arm in arm.

Yvon, who was now forty-two years of age, had changed very little in appearance. His hair was beginning to turn gray, and his skin was much sunburned; but he seemed to have gained in strength and vigour, his face was radiant, and his eyes were full of joyful tears.

"Come and let me take a good look at you, my child," he exclaimed, as he led his daughter to the light, and gazed at her with anxious tenderness, as if to satisfy himself that the health of this idolised child had improved since they parted; then, again enfolding her tenderly in his arms, he added:

"Ah, my beloved child, I can embrace you with a thankful heart, for I can see that you are much stronger than when I went away."

Then, addressing Dame Roberts for the first time, he said, with a friendly shake of the hand:

"I thank you with all my heart for your care and attentions, Suzanne, for I know how much you must have aided in Sabine's restoration to health."

And again turning to his daughter, Cloarek held out his arms.

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"One more embrace, my child, one more!" he cried.

"Fathers and daughters as well as lovers like to be alone together after a long absence, my dear," Segoffin whispered to the housekeeper.

"You are right, Segoffin," replied Suzanne, starting toward the door.

"Ah, Suzanne, what a fine opportunity this would be for a tender interview if we wanted one," said M. Cloarek's clerk as he followed Dame Roberts into the adjoining room.

"Unfortunately love is blind, my poor Segoffin, and you are only half blind yet."

"That will not prevent you from becoming Madame Segoffin," responded our friend, in tones of the most profound conviction. "That which is to be, will be."

CHAPTER XI.

SABINE'S CONFESSION.

WHEN Yvon found himself alone with his daughter, he embraced her again even more passionately than before, as if Dame Roberts's presence had been rather a constraint upon the transports of paternal tenderness hitherto ; then making Sabine seat herself on an ottoman near him and taking both her hands in his, he asked :

“ And now, how have you been feeling during the last three months, months which have seemed well-nigh interminable to me ? ”

“ Remarkably well, father.”

“ You look much stronger, I think. Besides — ”

“ What, my dear father ? ”

“ It may be only a doting father’s fancy, fathers have so many of them, but — ”

“ Let me hear what it is, father.”

“ It seems to me that you are even prettier than when I went away.”

“ That must be a doting father’s fancy, especially as it implies that I was pretty before you left.”

“ And who ever doubted it, mademoiselle ? ”

“ I, myself, in the first place.”

“ Then you never see yourself, or your mirror is a poor one. The more I look at you, the more convinced I am that you look less childish, somehow, and that you have quite a grown-up air.”

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"How absurd, father! In what does this change consist?"

"I can hardly explain, for your features have not changed, thank Heaven! but there is an air of sweet and gentle dignity about you that I never noticed before, and an expression of serene happiness on your features."

"How could it be otherwise when you have returned, father? It is something better than joy, it is happiness I feel on seeing you again, and happiness inclines one to be rather quiet and serious, you know."

"If you go on talking in this way my eyes will be so full of tears I shall not be able to see you at all, so let us change the subject. You have been well, you say; that is the main thing, of course, but have you not been lonely and dull here, my poor child? The winter months are so gloomy in the country."

"I have not been lonely a single moment, father. Haven't I my books, and my piano, and my embroidery, and my walks to occupy me?"

"And Suzanne, I scarcely need ask if she has been kind to you?"

"As you know her so well you must know that she has been kindness itself."

"And —"

But Yvon stopped short.

He was on the point of asking Sabine if her nervousness was abating, and if the attacks to which she had been subject from childhood were becoming less frequent, but he feared he might sadden his daughter, and decided it would be better to question the housekeeper on the subject.

So, to cover his sudden pause, he said:

"So you really enjoy yourself here in the country, you say? You have but to express a wish, you know, my dearest. The sea air has been recommended for you, it is true, but the coasts of France are extensive and there

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is abundant room for choice, and if you prefer any other place — ”

“ No, father, this place suits me perfectly. The surroundings are delightful, and I feel so much at home here that it would be ungrateful in me to leave the place unless you desire it.”

“ You know very well that I only desire what you desire.”

“ That sounds very fine, father.”

“ What do you mean, my child ? ”

“ I mean that your actions do not always correspond with your words.”

“ What actions ? ”

“ You say that you only desire what I desire. Yet how often I have begged you to give up the journeys that keep you away from me so much of the time.”

“ That is different. It is really for your sake, my darling child. I have my reasons.”

“ Yes, I know, my poor, dear father. It is to enrich me that you devote so much time to your business. But what is the use of so much money ? But you have told me nothing about yourself ! What kind of a trip did you have this time ? ”

“ A remarkably successful one.”

“ The roads were better this time, then, and you did not take cold ? I am so glad, we had so many snow-storms last month. I used to say to Suzanne again and again while we were sitting by the fire warm and comfortable, ‘ I am afraid my poor dear father is shivering with cold and making only a couple of miles an hour on account of the snow.’ ”

“ Don’t worry any more, my dear child. The trip is over now, and it was not only less fatiguing than usual, but unusually profitable.”

“ Is that really so ? Then why was your return so long delayed, father ? ”

“ A complication of business interests, that is all.”

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“If you knew how uneasy I always am during your absence! It is foolish, I know, but I shall be spared all these fears hereafter, for you intend to keep your promise, do you not?”

“What promise?”

“Not to travel, or, rather, not to leave me any more.”

“I promised you on condition that no unforeseen circumstance —”

“No excuses, now. You will remain with me?”

“Always.”

“Will you swear it?”

“By a father’s love.”

“Ah, I know what happiness is now,” cried Sabine, throwing herself on her father’s neck, “and yet, I have no words to tell you how happy I am, so, to reward you —”

“Well,” said Cloarek, smiling, but deeply moved by the touching expression of his daughter’s features, “so, to reward me —”

“I am going to ask a favour of you, as you are always reproaching me for never asking for anything.”

“You could not please me more, my dear child. Well, let me hear what it is. What have you to ask of me?”

“Your protection and aid.”

“For whom?”

“For a person who is worthy of it, and of whom Suzanne, too, intends to speak to you. But you see how jealous I am, I wish to be the first to recommend my protégé.”

“The protégé of both of you, then?”

“Yes, both of us.”

“Then you are tolerably certain of having your request granted. But what does the person desire?”

“Oh, he doesn’t dare to ask or even desire anything. He is so timid. That is the reason Suzanne and I both resolved to ask for him. His position is so interesting and so trying!”

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" My poor, tender-hearted child, how deeply in earnest you are, and how you are blushing ! I am sure the person you have in mind must be both very deserving and very unfortunate."

" Yes, father, and when one sees a person every day, and thus learns to know and appreciate him, one's interest naturally increases."

" But of whom are you speaking, my child ?"

" Of M. Onésime."

" And who is M. Onésime ? Onésime, Onésime,—I have heard the name before, it seems to me."

" M. Onésime is Suzanne's nephew."

" Ah, yes, I recollect now. She has often spoken of him. He is the son of the sister she lost a couple of years ago."

" Yes, my dear father, he is an orphan. He had a government clerkship at Lille, but he was obliged to give that up, and as he could not secure any other situation there, Suzanne sent for him to come here and stay until he could find something to do."

" What, he is here ?"

" Yes, father."

" He is living here in this house ?"

" He has been living here for the last two months."

" Why are you blushing again ?"

" But I am not blushing, father, I assure you."

" Surely, my dear child, you cannot suppose that I would be displeased because our friend Suzanne, to whom we owe so much, has entertained her nephew here, especially as he must be a well-behaved boy, or Suzanne would not have kept him with her."

" You must see him, father, and then you can judge for yourself."

" But how did he happen to lose his place ?"

" He was a copyist, but his sight is so bad that it interfered with his work, and they dismissed him. You can imagine, my dear father, how painful his present position

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is to him, for he has a good education, and cannot bear to be idle. His defective vision will make it very difficult for him to secure any position, I fear; so, father, I have been counting, that is to say, Suzanne and I have been counting on you to assist and advise M. Onésime. I am sure when you see him and know him, you will do anything in the world for him, he is so kind and good, and you will pity him and love him so much."

It is impossible to describe the naïve and touching manner in which Sabine uttered these last words, her changing colour and gently heaving breast betraying the lively interest she felt in her protégé.

Cloarek stood silent and thoughtful for a moment. He was beginning to understand the change he had noticed in his daughter's manner and expression. At last the young girl, surprised and somewhat alarmed by Yvon's silence, asked :

" Why do you not answer me, my dear father ? "

" Tell me, my child, since Suzanne's nephew has been living here, what has he done ? What kind of a life has he led ? "

" The same life we have led, father. When we go out to walk, he goes with us ; if we remain at home, he remains. We make him read to us a good deal,—he reads so well and with so much expression. Sometimes we play duets together, for he is an excellent musician. He is very well up, too, in history, and it is very pleasant and instructive to hear him talk on such subjects, and lastly, he is always trying to do us some little service, though he doesn't always succeed, for his poor sight makes him very awkward. But that is his only fault, my dear father," added Sabine, with charming ingenuousness, " and though he surely cannot be held accountable for it, Suzanne is pitiless toward it, for she is always making fun of him."

" You do not make fun of him, I am sure."

" It would be cruel in me to do that, father, for he

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tries to be the first to laugh at his mishaps, though they worry him terribly. It is so sad to be almost blind. And this very evening—you can judge from that how courageous he is—he scalded his hand nearly to the bone with boiling water. You will see, father, what a dreadful burn it was. Well, for all that, M. Onésime had self-control and courage enough not only to make no ado about it, but also to go on with his reading as if nothing had happened, so it was only by the merest chance that we discovered the accident nearly an hour afterward."

"Really, M. Onésime seems to be quite a hero."

"A hero; no, father, for, as we were saying this evening, only persons who kill and spill blood are called heroes, while M. Onésime—"

"Spills boiling water."

"Why, father!"

"Why do you look at me so reproachfully?"

"It seems strange that you, too, who are always so just—"

"Why, what great injustice have I been guilty of, my child?"

"You are making light of a very serious matter, father, for even Suzanne turned pale with fright when she saw his burn, though she is always ridiculing him in the most merciless manner. And why? Because he has such a horror of everything that is cruel and bloodthirsty. Only this evening we had quite a discussion with Suzanne, and M. Onésime was on my side, and he is on my side only when I am right, so I feel sure in advance that you will agree with us."

"What was the subject of this discussion, my child?"

"M. Onésime was reading, in that newspaper you see over there on the table, an account of the escape of a famous privateer named Captain l'Endurci. You have read it too, perhaps, father."

"No," replied Cloarek, repressing an involuntary

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movement of surprise and alarm ; “ no, my child. Well, what do you and M. Onésime think of the corsair ? ”

“ His cruelty shocked us, dear father ; for would you believe it ? to regain his liberty he killed two men and severely wounded a third. Suzanne approved his conduct, claiming that he had behaved in a very brave and heroic manner, but M. Onésime said, and this proves the generosity of his heart — ”

“ Well, what did M. Onésime say ? ”

“ That he would rather remain a prisoner all his life than owe his freedom to the death of another person. Don’t you think that M. Onésime and I are right ? ”

“ I hardly know what to say, my child. A humdrum merchant like myself is not a very good judge of such matters. Still, it seems to me that you and M. Onésime are rather hard on the poor privateer.”

“ But, father, read the frightful story, and you will see — ”

“ But listen, this privateer had a family, perhaps, that he tenderly loved, and that he was hoping soon to see again, and in his despair at finding himself a prisoner — ”

“ A family ! Men who live in the midst of carnage have families that they love tenderly ? Is that possible, father ? ”

“ Why, do not even wolves love their young ? ”

“ I don’t know anything about that ; but if they do love them, they love them after the manner of wolves, I suppose, bringing them a piece of their bleeding prey when they are little, and leading them out to attack and devour the poor lambs when they get older.”

A bitter expression flitted over Cloarek’s face ; then he answered, smiling :

“ After all, you and M. Onésime may be right. If you would talk to me about silks and merino I might hold my own, but I am not much of a judge of privateers and privateering.”

“ I was sure you would agree with us. How could a

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person who is as generous, compassionate, and affectionate as you are think otherwise? or, rather, I could not think differently from what you do, my dear father, for if I have a horror of everything that is cruel and wicked, if I love everything that is good and beautiful, is it not to you and your example I owe it, as well as to the precepts of my poor mother whom you loved so devotedly? for not a day passes that Suzanne does not relate some instance of your deep affection for her."

The conversation was here interrupted by the entrance of the housekeeper, candle in hand, who, to Yvon's great surprise, announced:

"I am very sorry, but it is ten o'clock, monsieur."

"Well, what of it, Suzanne?"

"It is the hour the doctor said mademoiselle must go to bed, you know."

"Give me just a quarter of an hour more, Suzanne?"

"Not a single minute, mademoiselle."

"On the evening of my return, you might permit this slight dissipation, it seems to me, Suzanne."

"Heaven be thanked, mademoiselle will have plenty of opportunity to see you now, but allowing her to sit up later than ten o'clock is not to be thought of. She would be sure to be tired out, if not ill, to-morrow."

"In that case, I have nothing to say except good night, my dear child," said Cloarek, taking his daughter's face in his two hands, and kissing her tenderly on the forehead. "Sleep well, my dearest, and may the morning find you well and happy."

"You need feel no anxiety on that score, my dear father. Now I know that you are here beside me, and that you will be with me, not only to-morrow but always, I shall go to sleep with that blissful thought on my mind, and I shall sleep on and on and on like a dormouse—that is the word, isn't it, Suzanne? So good night, my dear father, good night, good night."

Then she whispered:

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"I am sure Suzanne is going to speak to you about M. Onésime. How glad I am I got ahead of her. Good night, dearest father, good night."

"Good night, and pleasant dreams!"

"It will be the best night I have passed for many a month. Good night, my beloved father, good night."

"Good night, my child."

Then turning to the housekeeper, Cloarek added :

"Come back presently, Suzanne, I want to talk with you."

"Very well, monsieur ; I have something I wish to speak to you about, too."

When he was left alone, Cloarek began to walk the room. As he passed the table, the *Journal of the Empire* attracted his attention. He picked it up and glanced over the article to which his daughter had alluded.

"How indiscreet in Verduron to make a strictly confidential letter public, and without warning me!" he exclaimed, evidently much annoyed. "I have always feared that man's stupidity and greed would cause me trouble sooner or later. Fortunately, I have concealed my place of abode from him. To think of this happening now, when my child's feelings and mental condition make dissimulation more imperative than ever. Poor child, such a discovery would kill her!"

At that very instant the housekeeper reentered the room.

CHAPTER XII.

SUZANNE'S ENLIGHTENMENT.

"My dear Suzanne," said M. Cloarek, "first of all, I want to thank you for the excellent care you have taken of my daughter."

"Poor Mlle. Sabine, didn't I nurse her when she was a baby, and isn't she almost like my own child to me?"

"You have been a second mother to my child, I know. And it is on account of the tender affection you have always manifested toward her that I wish to talk with you on a very important matter."

"What is it, monsieur?"

"You sent for your nephew in my absence. He has been here nearly two months, I understand."

"Yes, and it is in regard to the poor fellow that I wish to talk with you this evening, monsieur. I will explain—"

"Sabine has told me all about it."

"Great Heavens! you are not angry, I hope."

"Not angry, Suzanne, but greatly worried and alarmed."

"Alarmed! Alarmed about what?"

"The effect of your nephew's presence in this house."

"Had I foreseen that it would be disagreeable to you, I would not have sent for the poor boy; but he was so unhappy, and I knew your kindness of heart so well, that I thought I might take the liberty—"

"You have rendered too valuable service to each and every member of my family, Suzanne, for your relatives

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not to have a right to my interest and assistance. What I reproach you for is a great imprudence."

"Excuse me, monsieur, but I do not understand."

"Your nephew is young?"

"Twenty-five."

"He is well educated?"

"Too well for his position, monsieur. My poor sister and her husband made great sacrifices for him. His sight being so poor, they gave him an excellent education in the hope he might enter the clergy, but Onésime felt that he had no calling that way, so there was nothing for him to do but secure a clerkship."

"I know the rest, but how about his personal appearance? What kind of a looking young man is he?"

"The poor fellow is neither handsome nor ugly, monsieur. He has a very kind and gentle manner, but his extreme near-sightedness gives him a rather scared look. He is really the best-hearted boy that ever lived. Ask mademoiselle, and see what she will tell you."

"Really, Suzanne, such blindness on your part amazes me."

"Such blindness, monsieur?"

"Is it possible, Suzanne, that you, who are a person of so much experience and good sense, have not felt, I will not say the impropriety, but the grave imprudence there is in having your nephew under the same roof with my daughter, and allowing them to live in the extremely intimate relations of such a secluded existence as you lead here?"

"I know that I am only a servant, monsieur, and that my nephew—"

"That is not the question at all. Have not I and my daughter always striven to prove that we regarded you as a friend, and not as a servant?"

"Then I do not understand the cause of your reproaches."

"And that is very unfortunate, for if you had been

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more clear-sighted, you would long since have discovered what has happened."

"Good Heavens! what has happened, monsieur?"

"Sabine loves your nephew."

"Mademoiselle!"

"She loves him, I tell you."

"Mademoiselle loves Onésime! Monsieur cannot be in earnest. It is impossible."

"Impossible, and why?"

"Because the poor boy is as timid as a girl; because he is not at all good-looking; because he sees very badly, a defect that makes him commit twenty blunders a day, at which mademoiselle is not unfrequently the first to laugh. He does not resemble a hero of romance in the least. Oh, no, monsieur, you need feel no anxiety on that score. Mademoiselle has always been very kind and considerate to Onésime, because he is my nephew, and she pitied him, but—"

"Ah, blind woman that you are, not to have foreseen that, in a person of Sabine's character, in a person of her extreme sensibility and angelic kindness of heart, pity was almost certain to lead to a more tender sentiment,—as it has!"

"Can it be possible that mademoiselle would condescend to look at a poor fellow like Onésime?"

"It is precisely because he is poor and helpless and timid, and because his infirmity places him in such an exceptional and painful position, that Sabine was almost certain to love him, and you, who know her as well as I do, should have foreseen this. I hope to Heaven that your blindness may not prove disastrous in its consequences."

"Ah, monsieur," responded the housekeeper, contritely, "your words enlighten me, now, when it is too late. But no, I cannot believe what you have just told me. Mlle. Sabine has not admitted that she loves Onésime, has she?"

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"Oh, no ; she has not admitted it, but I am satisfied of the fact. She is so candid and so sincere that one can read her heart as one reads an open book. She does love him, I tell you, and this destroys all the plans I had formed. But what is the matter ? Why are you sobbing so ? Suzanne, Suzanne, get up," cried Cloarek, seeing the housekeeper throw herself at his feet.

"I have such a dreadful fear."

"Explain."

"Good Heavens, monsieur, what if you should suppose that in asking my nephew here I was actuated by a desire to interest mademoiselle in him, and so bring about a marriage between them !"

"Suzanne, you do me a gross injustice by supposing me capable of such a suspicion."

"Tell me, oh, tell me that you do not believe me capable of such a thing."

"I repeat that you have been thoughtless and imprudent. That is all, and that is enough ; but as for accusing you of any such shameful plotting, that would be utterly absurd on my part. I understand, too, how certain peculiarities in your nephew's character seemed a sufficient guarantee against any such possibility, and that you never suspected that any such danger could threaten my daughter."

"Alas ! that is the truth, monsieur. I didn't consider Onésime any more dangerous than an infant."

"I believe you, but the evil is done, nevertheless."

"But it can be repaired. Onésime shall leave the house at daybreak, to-morrow morning, and never set foot in it again."

"And Sabine ? His sudden departure would grieve her terribly, it might even kill her, weak and nervous as she is, — for she is her poor dear mother over again, in her sensitiveness and extreme susceptibility."

SUZANNE'S ENLIGHTENMENT.

"*Mon Dieu*, I see, I see ! How culpable I have been !" sobbed the governess. "What are we to do, monsieur ? What are we to do ?"

"I have no idea myself."

Cloarek paced the room in silence several minutes, then he asked, suddenly :

"Where is your nephew ?"

"In the Blue Room, monsieur. I told him to wait there until I could let him know the result of my interview with you."

"Send him to me".

"Here, monsieur ?"

"Yes."

"Oh, monsieur, have pity on him, have pity on him, I beseech you !" cried Suzanne, clasping her hands imploringly. "I swear to you that it was not his fault. The poor boy is innocent of any wrong-doing, even in thought. He hasn't the slightest suspicion of all this, I am sure. Have pity on him, I implore you!"

"Send him to me, I say."

"He shall leave the house this very night, monsieur, I swear it !"

"And my daughter ! You want her to die of grief, perhaps !"

"One word, monsieur. It may be that mademoiselle's affection for Onésime is only a youthful fancy that time and absence will soon cause her to forget."

"But what if she does not forget it ? What if this love is really deep and true, as it must be, if it has once really taken root in a heart like Sabine's ? No, no, it would be an insult to the poor child to believe her capable of loving in that way. She is her mother over again, I tell you."

"Alas ! monsieur, what you say nearly breaks my heart, and yet I am forced to admit that you are right. I never realised, until this very moment, all the possible consequences of this deplorable intimacy ; for, unfor-

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tunately, this is not the only thing that must be considered."

"What do you mean?"

"Monsieur —"

"Speak, speak, I say."

"What if, — and it would not be his fault, remember, monsieur, — what if he should not share the affection he has inspired in mademoiselle —"

"Damnation!" exclaimed Cloarek.

Then after a moment's silence he said, sternly :

"Send your nephew here."

"Do not ask me to do that, monsieur!" pleaded Suzanne, in terror.

"Obey me, do you hear?"

"Not if you kill me, monsieur," replied Suzanne, resolutely ; "no, he shall not come. I will make him leave the house. I will not expose him to —"

"To what? To my violence, my anger, I suppose you mean. Don't you see that my daughter's love for him renders him sacred in my eyes?"

"But if he does not love her, monsieur?"

"If he does not love her?" exclaimed Cloarek, becoming frightfully pale ; then, without adding a word, and before the housekeeper, overcome with consternation, could make so much as a movement to prevent it, he rushed out of the parlour and into the room where Onésime was waiting to hear the result of his aunt's interview with the master of the house.

To open the door of this room, and close and lock it behind him, to prevent Suzanne from entering and Onésime from leaving it, was only the work of an instant, and he thus found himself alone with Suzanne's nephew.

CHAPTER XIII.

ONÉSIME'S CONQUEST.

ON hearing the violent opening and closing of the door, Onésime sprang up surprised and alarmed, for he was expecting to see only his aunt, and the heavy tread of the person who had just entered so boisterously indicated the presence of a stranger.

Cloarek, who had recovered the composure which had momentarily deserted him, scrutinised Onésime with anxious curiosity. At the first glance the countenance of the young man seemed gentle and prepossessing, but soon, forgetting the infirmity that prevented him from gaining more than a vague idea of objects a few feet from him, and seeing him gaze at him intently without giving any sign of recognition, he began to consider Onésime's manner extremely insolent, even audacious.

Suzanne's nephew, surprised at the prolonged silence, advanced a step or two in the hope of recognising the intruder, and at last asked, hesitatingly :

“ Who is it ? ”

Cloarek, still forgetting the young man's infirmity, thought the question impertinent, and replied :

“ Who is it ! It is the master of the house, I would have you know.”

“ M. Cloarek ! ” exclaimed Onésime, recoiling a little, for the speaker's manner and tone indicated only too plainly that his, Onésime's, presence in the house was unwelcome to Sabine's father, so after a moment he said, in a trembling, almost timid voice :

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"In complying with the wishes of my aunt, I believed, monsieur, that her request was made with your approval, or at least that you would not disapprove her kindness to me. But for that, I should not have thought of accepting her invitation."

"I hope so, indeed."

"I must therefore beg you to excuse an indiscretion of which I have been the involuntary accomplice, monsieur. I will leave your house to-morrow."

"And where will you go? What will you do?" demanded Cloarek, abruptly. "What will become of you afterward?"

"Not understanding the feeling that prompts these questions, you cannot be surprised that I hesitate to answer them," responded Onésime, with gentle dignity.

"My feeling may be kindly, and it may be the opposite,—that depends upon circumstances. I shall know presently, however."

"You seem to constitute yourself the sole arbiter of my destiny, monsieur!" exclaimed Onésime, with respectful firmness. "By what right, may I ask?"

"On the contrary, you seem to have made yourself the arbiter of my destiny," exclaimed Cloarek, impetuously.

"I do not understand you, monsieur."

"Do you dare to look me in the face and answer me in that way?"

"Look you in the face, monsieur? I wish that I could, but alas! at this distance I am utterly unable to distinguish your features."

"True, monsieur," replied Cloarek, with much less brusqueness, "I had forgotten your infirmity. But though you cannot see, you may rest assured that I have an eye that nothing escapes. It is one advantage that I have over you, and one that I shall profit by, I assure you."

"I assure you that this advantage will be of very little

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service to you so far as I am concerned. I have never had anything to conceal in my life."

This odd mixture of frankness and gentleness, of melancholy and dignity, touched Cloarek; nevertheless he tried to resist its softening influence.

"I am blessed with a very small amount of penetration, monsieur," continued Onésime, "but your questions and the tone in which they are asked, as well as some of your remarks, lead me to suppose that you have a grievance against me, though I am unfortunately ignorant of the cause."

"You love my daughter?" said Cloarek, gazing searchingly at the youth as if resolved to read his inmost thoughts.

Onésime turned red and pale by turns, and felt so much like falling that he was obliged to reseat himself at a small table and bury his face in his hands.

In his attempt to cover his face the handkerchief that was bound around his hand fell off, disclosing to view the terrible burn he had received, and though Cloarek was accustomed to seeing all sorts of hurts, the grave nature of this one made him shudder and say to himself:

"Poor wretch, how he must suffer! A person must have a good deal of courage to endure such torture uncomplainingly. Such courage, combined with such amiability of character, as well as quiet dignity, at least indicates nobility of heart."

Seeing how completely overcome Onésime seemed to be, Yvon asked, in rather more friendly tones:

"How am I to interpret your silence? You do not answer me."

"What can I say, monsieur?"

"You confess it, then?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"And is my daughter ignorant of this love?"

"Ignorant of it! Why, monsieur, I would rather die

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than reveal it to her. I thought I had concealed my secret in the depths of my innermost soul, so I have no idea how you can have discovered what I have almost succeeded in hiding from myself."

"Why did you not endeavour to overcome a feeling that could only make you unhappy?"

"Believing every one ignorant of it, I abandoned myself to it with delight. Up to this time I have only known misfortune. This love is the first happiness of my life, as it will be the only consolation of the dreary destiny that awaits me."

"You would be separated from my daughter sooner or later. Did that thought never occur to you?"

"No, monsieur, I did not stop to reflect. I think I loved merely for the happiness of loving. I loved without hope, but also without fear and without remorse."

"So you were not even deterred by a fear that I would find out about this love some day or other?"

"I did not reflect at all, as I told you just now. I loved only for the pleasure of loving. Ah, monsieur, when one is as I am, almost entirely isolated from external objects and the diversion of mind they cause, it is easy to yield oneself entirely to the solitary enjoyment of a single, all-absorbing passion."

"But if your sight is so bad, you can scarcely know how my daughter looks."

"During all the weeks I have been living in this house, I never saw Mlle. Sabine distinctly until this evening."

"And why this evening rather than any other evening?"

"Because she insisted on aiding my aunt in dressing a severe burn on my hand, and, while she was doing this, she came near enough for me to be able to distinguish her features perfectly."

"In that case, how did you come to love her?"

"How did I come to love her? Why, what I love

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in her," exclaimed Onésime, "is her noble and generous heart, the sweetness of her disposition, the charms of her mind. What do I love in her? Why, her sweet and soothing presence and her voice,—her voice, so gentle and touching when she utters words of friendly interest or consolation."

"Then the thought that you might become Sabine's husband some day has never occurred to you?"

"I love her too much for that, monsieur."

"What do you mean?"

"You forget, monsieur, that I am half blind, and that, by reason of this infirmity, I am doomed to ridicule, to poverty, or a humiliating idleness. I, who can never be anything but a burden to those who feel an interest in me, the idea that I should have the audacity — No, no, I repeat it, I even swear, that I have loved and still love Mlle. Sabine as one loves the good and the beautiful, without any other hope than of the heavenly felicity the love of the good and the beautiful inspires. This, monsieur, is what I have felt and still feel. If my frankness is convincing, deign to promise me, monsieur, that I shall at least take your esteem with me when I leave this house."

"You have won this esteem; you deserve it, Onésime," replied Cloarek, earnestly; "and after this assurance on my part, you will permit me to ask what you intend to do after leaving here."

"I shall endeavour to find some employment similar to that I was engaged in before; but, however modest and laborious my situation in life may be, if it enables me to earn my living, it is all I ask."

"But are you not afraid you will lose this situation for the same reasons you did before?"

"Alas! monsieur, if I allowed myself to think of all the trials and disappointments that are, undoubtedly, in store for me, I should become utterly disheartened," answered Onésime, sadly.

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"It was not to discourage you that I ventured this reminder. On the contrary, I wish, and certainly hope to find the means of helping you to escape from a position which must be unspeakably trying."

"Ah, monsieur, how kind you are! How have I deserved —"

The conversation was here interrupted by several hurried knocks at the door, and Suzanne's voice was heard, crying:

"Open the door, monsieur, for pity's sake!"

Cloarek instantly complied with the request.

"What is the matter?" he exclaimed, seeing Suzanne standing there, pale and terrified.

"Thérèse was just closing the windows in the dining-room, when she saw, in the moonlight, two men peering over the garden wall."

"Thérèse is a coward, afraid of her own shadow, I expect."

"Oh, no, monsieur, Thérèse did see the two men distinctly. They were evidently about to enter the garden, when the noise she made in opening the window frightened them away."

"These fears seem to me greatly exaggerated," replied Cloarek; "still, take good care not to say anything about this to Sabine to-morrow. It will only make the poor child terribly uneasy. It is a splendid moonlight night, and I will go out into the garden and satisfy myself that everything is all right."

"Go out into the garden!" cried Suzanne, in great alarm. "Don't think of such a thing. It would be very dangerous, I am sure."

"That is all nonsense, my dear Suzanne," said Cloarek, turning toward the door. "You are as great a coward as Thérèse."

"First, let me go and wake Segoffin, monsieur," pleaded Suzanne. "I tried before I came to you, but this time I will knock so loud that he can't help hearing me."

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"And at the same time wake my daughter and frighten her nearly to death by all this hubbub in the house."

"You are right, monsieur, and yet you ought not to venture out entirely alone."

"What are you doing, Onésime?" asked Cloarek, seeing the younger man making his way toward the door. "Where are you going?"

"I am going with you, monsieur."

"And what for?"

"My aunt thinks there may be some danger, monsieur."

"And of what assistance could you be?" asked Yvon, not curtly or scornfully this time, for Onésime's devotion touched him.

"It is true that I can be of very little assistance," sighed the unfortunate youth, "but if there is any danger, I can at least share it, and, though my sight is poor, perhaps, as a sort of compensation, I can hear remarkably well, so I may be able to find out which way the men went if they are still prowling around the house."

This artless offer was made with such evident sincerity, that Cloarek, exchanging a compassionate look with Suzanne, said, kindly :

"I thank you for your offer, my young friend, and I would accept it very gratefully if your hand did not require attention. The burn is evidently a deep one, and must pain you very much, so you had better attend to it without further delay, Suzanne," he added, turning to the housekeeper.

Cloarek went out into the garden. The moon was shining brightly on the sleeping waves. A profound stillness pervaded the scene, and no other human being was visible. Climbing upon the wall, he gazed into the depths below, for the garden wall on the side next the sea was built upon the brow of a steep cliff. Cloarek

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tried to discover if the grass and shrubbery on the side of the cliff had been broken or trampled, but the investigation revealed no trace of any recent visitor. He listened attentively, but heard only the murmur of the waves as they broke upon the beach, and, concluding that there was no cause for alarm as such a thing as a robbery had not been heard of since Sabine had lived there, he was about to leave the terrace and re-enter the house when he saw one of those rockets that are used in the navy as signals at night suddenly dart up from behind a clump of bushes half-way up the beach.

The rocket swiftly described a curve, its stream of light gleaming brightly against the dark blue heavens for an instant, then died out. This occurrence seemed so remarkable to Cloarek, that he hastily retraced his steps to see if there were any vessel in sight to respond to this signal from the shore, but no vessel of any sort or kind was visible,—only the broad expanse of ocean shimmering in the moonlight met his gaze.

After vainly endeavouring to explain this singular occurrence for some time, but finally deciding that the rocket must have been fired by smugglers as a signal, he returned to the house.

This occurrence, which ought, perhaps, to have furnished the captain with abundant food for thought, closely following as it did the bold abduction of which he had been the victim, was speedily forgotten in the grave reflections that his conversation with Onésime had awokened.

CHAPTER XIV.

ARGUMENTS FOR AND AGAINST.

WHEN Cloarek rapped at the door of his daughter's room the next morning, she promptly responded to the summons, smiling and happy.

"Well, my child, did you rest well?" he inquired.

"Splendidly, father. I had the most delightful dreams, for you bring me happiness even in my sleep."

"Tell me about these delightful dreams. I am always anxious to hear about everything that makes you happy, whether it be an illusion or reality," he responded, anxious to bring the conversation around naturally to the subject of Onésime. "Come, I am listening. What brilliant castles in Spain did you behold in your slumbers?"

"Oh, I am not ambitious, father, even in my dreams."

"Is that really so, my child?"

"It is indeed, father. My desires are very modest. Luxury and display have no charms for me. I dreamed last night that I was spending my life with you,—with you and dear Suzanne, and with Segoffin, who is so warmly attached to you."

"And who else?"

"Oh, yes, I forgot."

"Thérèse, I suppose?"

"No, not Thérèse."

"Who was it, then?"

"M. Onésime."

"M. Onésime? I do not understand that. How did M. Onésime happen to be living with us?"

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“We were married.”

The words were uttered in such a frank and ingenuous manner that Cloarek could not doubt the perfect truthfulness of his daughter’s account; and rather in doubt as to whether he ought to congratulate himself on this singular dream or not, he asked, a little anxiously :

“So you and M. Onésime were married, you say?”

“Yes, father.”

“And I had consented to the marriage?”

“You must have done so, as we were married. I don’t mean that we were just married,—we seemed to have been married a long time. We were all in the parlour. Three of us, you and Onésime and I, were sitting on the big sofa. Suzanne was crocheting by the window, and Segoffin was on his knees fixing the fire. You had been silent for several minutes, father, when, suddenly taking M. Onésime’s hand and mine,—you were sitting between us,—you said: ‘Do you know what I have been thinking?’ ‘No, father,’ M. Onésime and I answered (for naturally he, too, called you father). ‘Well,’ you continued, ‘I have been thinking that there is not a happier man in the world than I am. To have two children who adore each other, and two faithful old servants, or rather two tried friends, and spend one’s life in peace and plenty with them, surely this is enough and more than enough to thank the good God for now and always, my children.’ And as you spoke, father, your eyes filled with tears.”

“Waking as well as dreaming, you are, and ever will be, the best and most affectionate of daughters,” said Cloarek, deeply touched. “But there is one thing about your dream that surprises me very much.”

“And what is that?”

“Your marriage with Onésime.”

“Really?”

“Yes.”

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“How strange. It seemed so perfectly natural to me that I wasn’t at all surprised at it.”

“But in the first place, though this is not the greatest objection, by any means, M. Onésime has no fortune.”

“But how often you have told me that all these business trips, and all these frequent absences that grieve me so much, have been made solely for the purpose of amassing a handsome dowry for me.”

“That is true.”

“Then, in that case, M. Onésime does not need any fortune.”

“Nevertheless, though it is not absolutely indispensable that M. Onésime should possess a fortune, it is certainly very desirable. There is another objection.”

“Another ?”

“M. Onésime has no profession and consequently no assured social position.”

“He is not to blame for that, poor fellow ! Who could possibly consider his enforced idleness a crime ? Will, education, capability, none of these are lacking. It is his terrible infirmity that proves such an obstacle to everything he undertakes.”

“You are right, my child ; this infirmity is an insuperable obstacle that will unfortunately prevent him from achieving success in any career ; from creating any position for himself, and even from marrying, except in dreams, understand.”

“I don’t understand you at all, my dear father. I really don’t.”

“What! my child, don’t you understand that it would be folly in any woman to marry a half-blind man who cannot see ten feet in front of him ? don’t you understand that in such a case the rôles would be entirely reversed, and that, instead of protecting his wife, as every man ought to do, M. Onésime will have to be protected by the woman who would be foolish enough to marry him ?”

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“It seems to me only right that the person who is able to protect the other should do so.”

“Certainly; but this duty devolves upon the man.”

“Yes, when he is able to fulfil this duty; when he is not, it devolves upon the wife.”

“If she is foolish enough, I repeat, to accept such a life of self-sacrifice and weighty responsibility.”

“Foolish?”

“Idiotic, rather. Don’t look at me so indignantly.”

“Listen to me, father.”

“I am listening.”

“You have reared me with the utmost kindness and devotion; you have anticipated my every wish; you have surrounded me with every comfort; and for my sake you have exposed yourself to all the fatigue and discomfort of long business trips. Am I not right?”

“It was not only a pleasure, but my duty to do these things for you, my dear child.”

“A duty?”

“The most sacred of all duties.”

“To protect me — to be my guide and my support, you mean, do you not?”

“Precisely. It is the duty of every parent.”

“That is exactly what I was coming at,” said Sabine, with amusing naïveté. “It is a father’s duty to protect his child, you say?”

“Certainly.”

“But, father, suppose that you should meet with an accident during one of your journeys; suppose, for instance, that you should lose your sight, would I be foolish or idiotic if I did everything in my power to repay you for all you have done for me, and to act, in my turn, the part of guide, support, and protector? Our rôles would be reversed, as you say. Still, what daughter would not be proud and happy to do for her father what I would do for you? Ah, well, why should not a wife manifest the same devotion toward her husband

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that a daughter manifests toward her father? I am sure you will not be able to refute that argument, my dear father."

"But your comparison, though extremely touching, is by no means just. In consequence of some misfortune, or some deplorable accident, a girl might find herself obliged to become the support and protector of her father. In such a case, it is very grand and noble in her to devote her life and energies to him; but she has not deliberately chosen her father, so she is performing a sacred duty, while the woman who is free to choose would, I repeat,—don't glare at me so,—be a fool, yes, an idiot, to select for a husband—"

"An unfortunate man who needs to be surrounded with the tenderest solicitude," cried Sabine, interrupting her father. "So you really believe that a woman would be committing an act of folly if she made such a choice. Say that again, father, if you want me to believe it,—you, who have so generously devoted your life to your child, who have been so lenient to her many weaknesses, who have made every sacrifice for her,—tell me that it would be arrant folly to devote one's life to an unfortunate creature to whom Fate has been most unkind; tell me that it would be arrant folly to cling to him because an infirmity kept everybody else aloof from him; tell me this, father, and I will believe you."

"No, my generous, noble-hearted child, I do not say that. I should be lying if I did," exclaimed Cloarek, quite carried away by Sabine's generous enthusiasm; "no, I cannot doubt the divine happiness that one finds in devoting oneself to a person one loves; no, I cannot doubt the attraction that courage and resignation under suffering exert over all superior natures."

"So you see that my dream is not as extraordinary as you thought, after all," replied the girl, smiling.

"You are a doughty antagonist, and I will admit that

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I am beaten, or rather convinced, if you can answer one more objection as successfully."

"And what is that?"

"When a man loves, he loves body and soul; you must admit that. The contemplation of the charming face of a beloved wife is as sweet to a man as the realisation of her merits and virtues. Now, in a long conversation that I had last evening with M. Onésime, at your recommendation, remember, I asked him if he could see a person a few feet off, distinctly. He replied that he could not, and remarked in this connection that he had seen you plainly but once, and that was yesterday when you were assisting Suzanne in binding up his hand. The most inconceivable thing in your dream-marriage, after all, is a husband who spends his life near his wife without ever seeing her except by accident, as it were."

"Ah, well, father, I, for my part, think such a state of affairs is not without its advantages, after all."

"Really, that is going a little too far, I think."

"I will prove it to you if you wish."

"I defy you to do it."

"But, father, I have read somewhere that nothing could be more sacrilegious than to leave always exposed to view the portraits of one's loved ones; for the eye finally becomes so accustomed to these lineaments that the effect is perceptibly impaired."

"There may be some truth in this remark, but I do not perceive any special advantage to be derived from it so far as you are concerned."

"But if, on the contrary, these portraits are in a case that is opened only when one desires to contemplate the beloved features, the impression produced upon you is powerful in proportion to the rarity of the treat."

"Your reasoning is fairly good, to say the least; but how about the other party, the person that can see? She will be obliged to close her eyes, I suppose, and keep

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them closed, to prevent her husband's features from losing their charm."

"Are you really in earnest in making this objection?"

"Certainly I am."

"Then I will merely say in reply that, though I put myself in M. Onésime's place for a moment, that is no reason why I should renounce my own excellent eyesight, for I am not in the least afraid that I should ever tire of looking at my husband any more than I tire of looking at you, my dear father, and I know I could gaze at your face a hundred years without growing weary of reading on your noble features all your devoted tenderness for me," added Sabine, kissing her father fondly.

"My dear, dear child," murmured Cloarek, responding to his daughter's fervent caress, "how can I hope to contend successfully with your heart and reason. I must acknowledge myself beaten, I suppose, and confess that your dream is not so unreasonable, perhaps, after all, and that a woman might perhaps marry such a terribly near-sighted man if she really loved him. Nevertheless, in spite of your romantic way of regarding poor Onésime's infirmity, I should infinitely prefer — But, now I think of it —"

"Well, father?"

"During my travels I have heard a good deal about a young and wonderfully skilful surgeon,—a terrible gourmand, too, they say he is, by the way. It is his only fault, I understand. This young surgeon established himself in Paris a few years ago, and his fame has grown, until he is now considered one of the greatest celebrities of the scientific world. It is possible that he may be able to restore this poor fellow's sight."

"Do you really suppose there is any hope of that?" cried Sabine.

"I cannot say, my child, but I know several wonderful cures that Doctor Gasterini has effected, and I will write to him this very day. I am going out for a little

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while, but I shall be back in an hour, and as I shall want to see you as soon as I return, you had better wait for me here."

On leaving Sabine, Cloarek went up to Onésime's room, and, desiring that their conversation should be of the most secret character and free from any possibility of interruption, he asked that young man to accompany him on a promenade he intended to take on the beach before dinner.

CHAPTER XV.

AN UNWELCOME VISITOR.

SOON after M. Cloarck left the house in company with Onésime, Segoffin might have been seen standing on the garden terrace with an old spy-glass levelled on an object that seemed to be absorbing his attention and exciting his surprise and curiosity to the highest pitch.

The object was a vessel that he had just discovered in the offing and that elicited the following comments as he watched its evolutions.

“It seems preposterous! Am I dreaming, or is that really our brig? It must be! That rigging, that mast, those lines, are certainly hers, and yet it cannot be. That is not her hull. With her barbette guns she sat as low in the water as a whaler. I don’t see a single gun poking its nose out of this craft, though. No, no, it is not, of course it is not. This vessel is painted a dark gray, while the *Hell-hound* was black with scarlet stripes. And yet that big sail perched so rakishly over the stern, that rigging fine as a spider’s web, there never was a vessel built except the *Hell-hound* that could carry such a stretch of canvas as that. But what an ass I am! She is putting about, so there’s a sure way of satisfying myself of the identity I wish to verify, as M. Yvon used to say when he wore the robes of office and amused himself by throwing chief justices out of the window,— that is to read the name on her stern, as I shall be able to do in a minute or two, and —”

But Segoffin’s soliloquy was here interrupted by a

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familiar tap on the shoulder, and, turning quickly, he found himself face to face with Suzanne.

“That which is done can not be undone, but the devil take you, my dear, for disturbing me just at this time!” exclaimed M. Cloarek’s head gunner, raising his glass to his eye again.

But unfortunately he was too late. The brig had completed the evolution, and the name on her stern was no longer visible, so the verification of her identity which Segoffin contemplated had become impossible.

“So the devil may have me and welcome, may he?” responded Suzanne, tartly. “You are very polite, I must say.”

“Frankness is a duty between old friends like ourselves,” said Segoffin, casting a regretful glance seaward. “I came here to amuse myself by watching the passing ships, and you had to come and interrupt me.”

“You are right; frankness is a duty between us, Segoffin, so I may as well tell you, here and now, that no stone-deaf person was ever harder to wake than you.”

“How do you know? Unfortunately for me and for you, Suzanne, you have never had a chance to see how I sleep,” responded the head gunner, with a roguish smile.

“You are very much mistaken, for I rapped at your door last night.”

“Ah!” exclaimed Segoffin, winking his only remaining eye with a triumphant air, “I have often told you that you would come to it sooner or later, and you have.”

“Come to what?” inquired the housekeeper, without the slightest suspicion of her companion’s real meaning.

“To stealing alone and on tiptoe to my room to—”

“You are an abominably impertinent creature, M. Segoffin. I rapped at your door to ask your aid and protection.”

“Against whom?”

“But you are such a coward that you just lay there

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pretending to be asleep and taking good care not to answer me."

"Tell me seriously, Suzanne,—what occurred last night? Did you really think you needed me?"

"Hear that, will you! They might have set fire to the house and murdered us, it wouldn't have made the slightest difference to you. M. Segoffin was snug in bed and there he remained."

"Set fire to the house and murdered you! What on earth do you mean?"

"I mean that two men tried to break into this house last night."

"They were two of your lovers, doubtless."

"Segoffin!"

"You had probably made a mistake in the date —"

But the head gunner never finished the unseemly jest. His usually impassive features suddenly assumed an expression of profound astonishment, succeeded by one of fear and anxiety. The change, in fact, was so sudden and so striking that Dame Roberts, forgetting her companion's impertinent remarks, exclaimed:

"Good Heavens, Segoffin, what is the matter with you? What are you looking at in that way?"

And following the direction of Segoffin's gaze, she saw a stranger, preceded by Thérèse, advancing toward them. The newcomer was a short, stout man with a very prominent abdomen. He wore a handsome blue coat, brown cassimere knee-breeches, high top-boots, and a long white waistcoat, across which dangled a double watch-chain lavishly decorated with a number of charms. In one hand he held a light cane with which he gaily switched the dust from his boots, and in the other he held his hat, which he had gallantly removed at the first sight of Dame Roberts. This newcomer was Floridor Verduron, the owner of the brig *Hell-hound*, usually commanded by Captain l'Endurci.

Up to this time Cloarek had concealed from Verduron

his real name as well as the motives which had led him to take up privateering. He had also taken special pains to keep his place of abode a secret from the owner of the privateer, a mutual friend having always served as an intermediary between the captain and the owner. Consequently, the dismay of the head gunner can be readily imagined when he reflected that, as the captain's real name and address had been discovered by M. Verduron, and that gentleman was wholly ignorant of the double part M. Cloarek was playing, his very first words were likely to unwittingly reveal a secret of the gravest importance. M. Verduron's presence also explained, at least in part, the arrival of the brig Segoffin had seen a short time before, and which he fancied he recognised under the sort of disguise he could not yet understand.

Meanwhile, M. Floridor Verduron was coming nearer and nearer. Suzanne noted this fact, and remarked :

“ Who can this gentleman be ? What a red face he has ! I never saw him before. Why don't you answer me, Segoffin ? Good Heavens, how strangely you look ! And you are pale, very much paler than usual.”

“ It is the redness of this man's face that makes me look pale by contrast, I suppose,” replied Segoffin, seeing himself confronted by a danger he was powerless to avert.

The servant, who was a few steps in advance of the visitor, now said to Suzanne :

“ Dame Roberts, here is a gentleman who wishes to see the master on very important business, he says.”

“ You know very well that monsieur has gone out.”

“ That is what I told the gentleman, but he said he would wait for his return, as he must see monsieur.”

As Thérèse finished her explanation of the intrusion, M. Verduron, who prided himself upon his good manners, and who had won fame in his earlier days as a skilful dancer of the minuet, paused about five yards from Dame Roberts and made her a very low bow, with his

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elbows gracefully rounded, his heels touching each other, and his feet forming the letter V.

Dame Roberts, flattered by the homage rendered to her sex, responded with a ceremonious curtsey, saying *sotto voce* to Segoffin the while, with a sarcastically reproachful air:

“Notice how a polite gentleman ought to accost a lady.”

M. Floridor Verduron, advancing a couple of steps, made another profound bow, to which Suzanne responded with equal deference, murmuring to Segoffin as if to pique him or arouse his emulation:

“These are certainly the manners of a grandee,—of an ambassador, in fact.”

The head gunner, instead of replying, however, tried to get as much out of sight as possible behind an evergreen. M. Verduron’s third and last salute (he considered three bows obligatory) was too much like the others to deserve any especial mention, and he was about to address Suzanne when he caught sight of the head gunner.

“What! you here?” he exclaimed, with a friendly nod. “I didn’t see you, you old sea-wolf. And how is your eye getting along?”

“I have no use of it, as you see, M. Verduron, but don’t let’s talk about that, I beg of you. I have my reasons.”

“I should think so, my poor fellow, for it would be rather making light of misfortune, wouldn’t it, madame?” asked the visitor, turning to Suzanne, who bowed her assent with great dignity, and then said:

“The servant tells me you wish to see M. Cloarek on pressing business, monsieur.”

“Yes, my dear madame, very pressing,” replied the ship owner, gallantly. “It is doubtless to monsieur’s wife I have the honour of speaking, and in that case, I—”

“Pardon me, monsieur, I am only the housekeeper.”

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“ What ! the cap— ”

But the first syllable of the word captain had not left the ship owner’s lips before the head gunner shouted at the top of his voice, at the same time seizing Suzanne suddenly by the arm :

“ In Heaven’s name, look ! See there ! ”

The housekeeper was so startled that she uttered a shrill cry and did not even hear the dread syllable the visitor had uttered, but when she had partially recovered from her alarm, she exclaimed, sharply :

“ Really, this is intolerable, Segoffin. You gave me such a scare I am all of a tremble now.”

“ But look over there,” insisted the head gunner, pointing toward the cliffs ; “ upon my word of honour, one can hardly believe one’s eyes.”

“ What is it ? What do you see ? ” asked the ship owner, gazing intently in the direction indicated.

“ It seems impossible, I admit. I wouldn’t have believed it myself if anybody had told me.”

“ What is it ? What are you talking about ? ” demanded Suzanne, her curiosity now aroused, in spite of her ill-humour.

“ It is unaccountable,” mused the head gunner, to all appearance lost in a sort of admiring wonder. “ It is enough to make one wonder whether one is awake or only dreaming.”

“ But what is it you see ? ” cried the ship owner, no less impatiently than the housekeeper. “ What are you talking about ? Where must we look ? ”

“ You see that cliff there to the left, don’t you ? ”

“ To the left ? ” asked the ship owner, ingenuously, “ to the left of what ? ”

“ To the left of the other, of course.”

“ What other ? ” demanded Suzanne, in her turn.

“ What other ? Why, don’t you see that big white cliff that looks like a dome ? ”

“ Yes,” answered the ship owner.

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“ Well, what of it ? ” snapped Suzanne.

“ Look, high up.”

“ High up, Segoffin ? ”

“ Yes, on the side.”

“ On the side ? ”

“ Yes, don’t you see that bluish light playing on it ? ”

“ Bluish light ? ” repeated the ship owner, squinting up his eyes and arching his hand over them to form a sort of shade.

“ Yes, high up, near the top ! The deuce take me if it isn’t turning red now ! Look, will you ! Isn’t it amazing ? But come, M. Verduron, come, let’s get a closer look at it,” added Segoffin, seizing the ship owner by the arm and trying to drag him away.

“ One moment,” exclaimed M. Verduron, releasing himself from the head gunner’s grasp, “ to take a closer look at anything one must first have seen it at a distance, and the devil take me if I can see anything at all. And you, madame ? ”

“ I don’t, I am sure, monsieur.”

Segoffin would perhaps have attempted to prolong the illusion by endowing the light with all the other colours of the rainbow, but the approach of another and even greater danger extinguished his inventive genius.

He heard Sabine’s voice only a few feet from him, exclaiming :

“ What are you all looking at, my dear Suzanne ? ”

“ Mlle. Sabine ! ” Segoffin mentally exclaimed. “ All is lost ! Poor child ! Such a revelation will kill her, I fear.”

CHAPTER XVI.

SEGOFFIN'S RUSE.

ON seeing Sabine, M. Floridor Verduron began his reverential evolutions all over again, and the girl returned his bows blushingly, for she had not expected to meet a stranger in the garden.

Segoffin, terrified at the thought that Cloarek's secret might be revealed at any moment, resolved to get the visitor away at any cost; so, interrupting him in the midst of his genuflections, he said :

“ And now, M. Verduron, if you will come with me I will take you to monsieur at once.”

“ But my father has gone out, Segoffin,” said Sabine.

“ Never mind, mademoiselle, I know where to find him.”

“ But it would be much better for monsieur to wait for my father here, I think,” insisted the girl. “ He said he would soon be back, and if you go out in search of him you run a great risk of missing him, Segoffin, and of giving this gentleman a long walk for nothing, perhaps.”

“ No, no, mademoiselle, it is such a delightful day monsieur will enjoy a little walk, and I know a very pleasant road your father is sure to return by.”

“ But he might not return that way, Segoffin,” interposed Suzanne, favourably disposed toward the visitor, by reason of his extreme politeness, and consequently anxious to enjoy his society as long as possible.

“ But I tell you that — ”

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"My good friend," interrupted M. Verduron, "I must admit that I am too gallant, or rather not sufficiently unselfish, to debar myself of the pleasure of waiting here for the return of —"

"Very well, very well," interposed Segoffin, quickly, "we won't say any more about it. I thought mine would be the better plan; but it doesn't matter in the least, in fact, now I think of it, there is something particular that I want to speak to you about. I only ask two minutes of your time —"

"Two minutes, fair ladies!" exclaimed the visitor, laughing, "as if two minutes spent out of such delightful society was not two centuries of time."

"Ah, monsieur, you are really too kind," exclaimed Suzanne, bridling coquettishly in her delight at this new compliment.

"You will have to make up your mind to it, Segoffin," said Sabine, who was beginning to find M. Verduron very amusing.

"But I really must speak to you in private, monsieur, and at once," exclaimed the head gunner, greatly alarmed now.

"Come, come, my worthy friend, don't speak in such thunder tones, you will frighten these fair ladies," said M. Verduron, too anxious to exercise his fascinations upon the ladies to comply with Segoffin's request. "I will promise you a private audience after they have deprived us of the light of their presence, but not until then."

"But at least listen to what I have to say," insisted poor Segoffin, desperate now, and trying to get near enough to the visitor to whisper a few words in his ear.

But that gentleman hastily drew back with a loud laugh.

"No whispering in the presence of ladies, man! What do you take me for, a savage, a cannibal? This indis-

creet friend of mine seems to be resolved to ruin me in your estimation, my dear ladies."

"Oh, you have no idea how obstinate M. Segoffin is," remarked Suzanne. "When he once gets anything into his head there is no moving him."

The head gunner made no reply. Foiled in his efforts to get the visitor away, he now came a little closer to the trio, with the expression of a person who is prepared for the worst.

"So it is to Mlle. Cloarek that I have the honour of speaking," said the ship owner, gallantly, turning to Sabine.

"Yes, monsieur, and you, I understand, are one of my father's friends."

"He has no more devoted friend and admirer, I assure you, mademoiselle. I should be very ungrateful if I were not; I am under such great obligations to him."

"My father has been fortunate enough to render you some service, then, monsieur."

"Some service, mademoiselle? He has made my fortune for me."

"Your fortune, and how?" asked Sabine, much surprised.

"Why, mademoiselle," interrupted Segoffin, hastily, "it is in this gentleman's interest that your father has made so many — so many trips."

"That is true, mademoiselle," replied the ship owner, "and every one, almost without exception, has yielded rich returns."

"Yes, he is a great manufacturer," whispered Segoffin, edging in between Sabine and Suzanne. "We sell lots of goods for him during our trips."

"Then you are at least partially accountable for the anxiety which my father's frequent absences cause me, monsieur," remarked Sabine.

"And you have no idea how unreasonable mademoiselle is, monsieur," chimed in Suzanne. "She frets just

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as much as if her father were really in some danger — ”

“ Some danger ! Ah, my dear lady, you may well say — ”

“ Yes, it is astonishing how people deceive themselves,” interrupted Segoffin, with great volubility. “ Everybody thinks that everybody else has an easy time of it, and because a person makes a good deal of money, other people think he has only to stop and rake it up.”

“ Appearances are, indeed, very deceitful, my dear young lady,” remarked the ship owner, “ and though your father makes so light of the danger he incurs, I assure you that in the last fight — ”

“ Fight ?” exclaimed the young girl, in astonishment ; “ fight ?”

“ What fight are you speaking of, monsieur ?” asked Suzanne, in her turn, no less amazed.

“ Why, a desperate fight, a fight to the death,” whispered Segoffin, “ with a merchant who didn’t find our goods to his taste, but M. Cloarek and I finally succeeded so well in bringing him around to our way of thinking that he ended by taking a hundred pieces from us — ”

“ What on earth is the fellow talking about, my dear ladies ?” cried M. Verduron, who had tried several times to interrupt Segoffin, but in vain. “ Has my worthy friend gone stark, staring mad ?”

“ Mad !” exclaimed Segoffin, in a voice of thunder. Then advancing toward M. Verduron, he said, in threatening tones :

“ You call me a madman, do you, you old rascal !”

For the fact is the head gunner, finding himself at the end of his resources, and despairing of averting the evil moment much longer, had resolved upon heroic measures ; so, taking advantage of the amazement of the ship owner, who was very naturally stupefied by this sudden change of manner, Segoffin continued, in still more violent tones :

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“ Yes, you are an insolent old rascal, and if you try any more of your impudence on me, I’ll shake you out of your boots.”

“ Segoffin, what are you saying, in Heaven’s name ? ” cried Sabine, all of a tremble.

“ What ! you have the audacity to speak to me in this way, and in the presence of ladies, too ! ” exclaimed the ship owner.

“ Take mademoiselle away from here at once,” Segoffin said to Suzanne, *sotto voce*. “ We are going to have a row, and it will be sure to throw her into a spasm. Get her away, get her away at once, I say.”

Then, rushing upon the ship owner, and seizing him by the collar, he shouted :

“ I’ve a great mind to hurl you down the cliff through that gap in the wall, you old bergamot-scented fop.”

“ Why, this poor man has gone stark, staring mad. Did any one ever see the like of it ? What has happened to him ? ” stammered the amazed visitor.

“ In God’s name, take mademoiselle away ! ” thundered Segoffin, again turning to the housekeeper.

That lady, seeing Sabine turn pale and tremble like a leaf, had not waited to hear this injunction repeated before trying to lead Sabine to the house, but the young girl, in spite of her terror and the housekeeper’s entreaties, could not be induced to leave the spot, deeming it cowardly to desert her father’s friend under such circumstances ; so, releasing herself from Suzanne’s grasp, she approached the two men and cried, indignantly :

“ Segoffin, your conduct is outrageous. In my father’s name I command you to stop such scandalous behaviour at once.”

“ Help, help, he is strangling me ! ” murmured M. Verduron, feebly. “ Ah, when the captain — ”

The word captain sealed the ship owner’s fate. In the twinkling of an eye Segoffin had seized M. Verduron around the waist, and had sprung with him over the low

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parapet on to the grassy slope below, where, still locked in each other's arms, they rolled unharmed to the bottom of the cliff, while Sabine, unable to control the terror which this last incident had excited, swooned in Suzanne's arms.

"Help, Thérèse, help! Mademoiselle has fainted; help!" cried the housekeeper. The servant came running in answer to the summons, and with her assistance Sabine was carried to the house.

This call was heard by Segoffin, who at once said to himself: "There is no further cause for fear; our secret is safe!"

So he released his hold upon M. Floridor Verduron, who staggered to his feet, panting and dishevelled, and so angry that he was unable to utter a word, though his eyes spoke volumes. Segoffin, profiting by this silence, said to the ship owner, with the most good-humoured air imaginable, quite as if they were continuing a friendly conversation, in fact:

"Now, my dear M. Verduron, I will explain why I was obliged to force you to follow me to this rather lonely retreat."

"Wretch, how dare you insult me in this fashion?" yelled the ship owner, exasperated beyond endurance by the head gunner's coolness.

"It was all your fault, M. Verduron."

"My fault? How outrageous!"

"I asked you to give me a moment's conversation in private, but you wouldn't do it, so I was obliged to resort to this little manoeuvre to secure it."

"Very well, very well, we will see what the captain says about all this. To place me in such a position, and in the presence of ladies!"

"I really ask your pardon for the liberty I took, M. Verduron," said Segoffin, seriously enough this time, "but upon my honour I was absolutely compelled to do it."

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“ What ! you dare — ”

“ Listen to me. For several very important reasons M. Cloarek has carefully concealed from his daughter the fact that he has been engaged in privateering.”

“ Is that really so ? ” exclaimed the ship owner, his wrath giving place to profound astonishment. “ Possibly that is the reason he took such pains to conceal his real name and address from me, then.”

“ Yes, and in order to explain his frequent absences he has given his daughter to understand that he sells dry goods on a commission, so you can understand my embarrassment when I saw you drop down upon us from the clouds.”

“ But why didn’t you ask me to keep the secret ? ”

“ That was what I wanted to speak to you in private about. After you refused, it was like treading on live coals to continue the conversation, and when I saw you were certain to let the cat out of the bag there was nothing for me to do but tumble you down the cliff to get you away from Mlle. Sabine and the housekeeper. It was pretty rough treatment, I admit, but I could see no other way out of the difficulty.”

“ I forgive you, Segoffin,” said M. Verduron, magnanimously. “ I must even admit that it was very clever of you to — ”

“ Where are they ? Where are they ? ” shouted M. Cloarek’s voice high above their heads.

“ They both fell over the cliff, monsieur,” replied the voice of Thérèse.

Almost immediately Yvon’s head appeared above the parapet.

On seeing the ship owner, he stood a moment as if stupefied, then remembering that M. Verduron’s presence imperilled the secret he was so anxious to guard, he exclaimed :

“ Damnation ! You here, monsieur ! How dare you — ”

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But with three bounds Segoffin had reached the brow of the cliff.

"Don't be alarmed; Mlle. Sabine and Suzanne know nothing," he cried.

"Thank God! I can breathe again!" murmured Cloarek, relieved of a terrible apprehension.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE VOICE OF THE TEMPTER.

CLOAREK, reassured in regard to the probable consequences of the ship owner's visit, was anxious to ascertain the object of his coming, but it was first necessary to devise some way of helping him up the cliff, so Segoffin went in search of a rope. They threw one end of it to M. Verduron, and he soon made the ascent, thanks to its aid.

"Come in the house," said Cloarek, without making any attempt to conceal his annoyance. "I want to know why you ventured to come and search me out when I had taken such pains to conceal my identity."

"Well, to make a long story short, I came to hold a council of war with you."

"A council of war? Are you mad?"

"By no means, my brave captain, as you will profit by it to the extent of at least four or five hundred thousand francs."

"In other words, you want me to put to sea again, I suppose. But one question, here and now: What right had you to make a confidential letter that I wrote to you — what right, I say, had you to make such a letter public?"

"I thought it would give such pleasure to the many readers of the *Journal*, all of whom are hungering for news of the bravest and most renowned of privateers."

"You are very complimentary, I am sure, but this indiscretion on your part has annoyed me greatly."

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“In that case your modesty will certainly suffer very much from the article in to-day’s paper.”

“What article? Let me tell you once for all—”

“Don’t be alarmed, my dear captain. It merely described how the brave Captain l’Endurei conducted an attack, how like a tiger he fought, etc. It said nothing in relation to his private life.”

“This is unbearable,” said Cloarek, impatiently, though he was in reality greatly relieved.

“I was certainly actuated by no evil motive, in any event; besides, as Segoffin says, there is no undoing that which is done, or words to that effect.”

“It is useless to discuss the matter further. You came here to ask me to put to sea again. I shall do nothing of the kind. That is the end of it.”

“But it is not the end of it by any means, my dear captain. Just give me your attention for a moment. A three-master belonging to the East India Company, with two million francs in bullion, will soon be along. Two million francs, do you hear?”

“If she had ten millions aboard it would make no difference to me. I shall not put to sea again. I have said it, and I mean it.”

“It is true that you have said so, my dear captain, but you will change your mind — for many reasons.”

“I never go back on my word, monsieur.”

“No more do I; but often, and in spite of ourselves, circumstances force —”

“Once again I tell you that I said no, and no it is.”

“You said no, I admit! You will say yes, too, my dear captain,” responded the ship owner, with an air of profound conviction.

“Enough, M. Verduron, enough!” cried Cloarek, stamping his foot, angrily.

“Don’t irritate M. Yvon,” Segoffin remarked to the ship owner, *sotto voce*. “I know him. You’ll only bring down a terrific storm upon your head.”

"All I ask, my dear captain," persisted M. Verduron, "is that you will give me your attention for five minutes, that is all."

"Go on, then."

"You will see by this clipping from an English newspaper,—and the sources of information seem to be perfectly trustworthy, by the way,—you will see that the British cruiser *Vanguard* which is convoying the richly laden vessel is commanded by Captain Blake."

"Captain Blake?"

"The same," replied the ship owner. "He is, as you know, one of the most daring officers in the British navy, and, unfortunately for us, he has always come off victorious in his encounters with our vessels."

"Oh, if I could only have been lucky enough to get a shot at him!" muttered Segoffin.

"You will, never fear, you old sea-wolf. As for you, my dear captain, your silence means consent, I am sure. Think of the honour, as well as the profit, to be derived from the operation: four or five hundred thousand francs and the *Vanguard* in tow of the *Hell-hound*, all in forty-eight hours."

Segoffin, who had been accustomed for years to make a profound study of his employer's physiognomy, and who had been carefully noting the effect of these proposals, said in a low tone to the ship owner, shaking his head the while:

"The bait is tempting, but he isn't going to swallow it this time."

His prognostications proved correct; the flush of anger gradually faded from Cloarek's face; his contracted features relaxed, and it was calmly, half-smilingly, that he at last said to M. Verduron:

"You are a clever tempter, but I have a talisman against you. It is the promise I have made to my daughter not to leave her again. You have seen her, and you must feel that I shall keep my word."

THE VOICE OF THE TEMPTER.

"Mlle. Cloarek is a charming girl. There is not the slightest doubt of that, my dear captain, but you would be very foolish to miss such a fine opportunity as this."

"It is impossible, I tell you."

"Help me persuade him, Segoffin, and then you will get your wished-for shot at Captain Blake, I promise you."

"Segoffin knows that I never break my word, M. Verduron. I said no, and no it is."

"*Sacre bleu!* it is amazing how atrociously selfish some people are!" exclaimed the ship owner, highly incensed by Cloarek's refusal.

"You must be jesting, M. Verduron," responded Cloarek, who could not help smiling at this outbreak. "It is all very easy for you to talk about stirring conflicts. I, for my part, should like to know which is the most selfish, you who remain safe and comfortable in your office at Dieppe, or the sailor who mans your ship, and exposes himself to all the perils of deadly combats."

"You talk as if I had to run no risk whatever," exclaimed Verduron. "You forget to say anything about the bullets I receive."

"Well, upon my word! I never knew before that you, too, were in the habit of exposing yourself to a shower of bullets!" cried Segoffin.

"Isn't my vessel under fire if I am not? And how about all the repairs, and all the damages your humble servant has to pay for? And the wounds, and the legs and arms, you have forgotten what they cost me, I suppose. Didn't I have to pay for five legs and three arms lost in that last fight of yours? Reckon them up at the rate of fifty crowns a limb, and see what they come to."

"But you must remember that you don't have to pay a sou when a man loses his head," retorted Segoffin.

"This is no subject for jesting, I want you to understand," snapped the ship owner, who was evidently

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becoming more and more excited, "for am I not doing everything on earth to secure you the best of crews ? For don't you think, yourself, captain, that the prospect of a small pension in case of serious injuries encourages our sailors and makes regular devils of them under fire ? And yet when I am bleeding myself in this fashion, I am repaid by the blackest ingratitude."

"What you say is absurd," replied Cloarek, shrugging his shoulders. "I have quadrupled your fortune."

"And because Captain l'Endureci has made all the money he wants, he doesn't care in the least whether other persons have or not," persisted the ship owner.

"There is not the slightest need of your working yourself into such a passion, Verduron," replied Cloarek. "There are plenty of brave sea-captains in Dieppe, thank Heaven ! quite as capable of commanding the *Hell-hound* and contending successfully with Captain Blake as I am."

"Then you refuse, captain ?"

"For the tenth time, yes."

"Positively ?"

"Positively."

"Very well, then, captain," responded the ship owner, resolutely. "What I have been unable to obtain by persuasion and entreaties, I shall obtain in some other way."

"What does he mean ?" asked Cloarek, turning to Segoffin.

"I mean that it is not easy to resign oneself to the loss of at least half a million, captain," responded Verduron, threateningly ; "so, though I had no idea that you would persist in your refusal, I was prudent enough to take my precautions."

"Your precautions ?"

"The *Hell-hound* is now in Havre, where she arrived this morning."

"Then it was the *Hell-hound* I saw !" cried Segoffin. "I thought I couldn't be mistaken."

THE VOICE OF THE TEMPTER.

“The brig is at Havre ?” exclaimed Cloarek.

“Yes, M. Yvon, but disguised beyond any possibility of recognition. She has been painted gray with a broad yellow band, and not a sign of a gun is visible.”

“And now will you be kind enough to tell me what all this signifies ?” demanded Cloarek.

“It means that I have changed the appearance of the brig as much as possible, because all the British cruisers are on the lookout for her, and now, thanks to this disguise, you will be able to reach Jersey with little or no trouble.”

“You are persistent, I must say,” said Cloarek, restraining himself only by a powerful effort.

“Yes, captain, and what is more, I’ve got you, and I mean to keep you. The crew are wild with enthusiasm ; the prospect of another voyage under you has made them frantic with delight. They expect to see you this evening, and I warn you that if you are not in Havre within an hour, they will be here in two hours.”

“What ! You will dare — ” began Cloarek, in a voice choked with anger.

“I ? Why, I have nothing to do with it, captain. It is your sailors that you will have to deal with, and you have had a chance to find out whether they are milk-sops or not. If you persist in your refusal, you will see one hundred and fifty of those dare-devils here with drums and fifes, and resolved to have their brave captain, whether or no. I am afraid those drums and fifes will destroy your *incognito* effectually this time.”

“Wretch !” roared Cloarek, realising how entirely feasible the ship owner’s plan was, and he would have precipitated himself upon his tormentor if Segoffin had not suddenly interposed his own body between the two men and said to Cloarek :

“Remember that there are white hairs under his musk-scented powder, M. Yvon.”

“Oh, knock me down ! Kill me, if you like ! that will

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not prevent the crew from coming for you, nor you from going with them," snarled the ship owner.

"Don't talk so loud, gentlemen, I beg of you. I hear somebody coming now."

In another instant Suzanne appeared, pale and terrified.

"Oh, monsieur,—come,—come quick!" she cried.

"What is the matter?"

"Mademoiselle—"

"Is my daughter worse?"

"Oh, monsieur, I am so frightened,—come, come!"

Cloarek, forgetting everything else in his alarm, rushed off, leaving Segoffin and the ship owner alone together.

"M. Verduron, I tell you very plainly, you have had a narrow escape," said the head gunner. "I have only one piece of advice to give you. Get away from here as soon as possible."

"You may be right," replied the visitor, hastily picking up his hat and cane.

"I am right."

"Well, listen to me. You know I mean well, and I must admit now that I am sorry I tried to carry things with such a high hand, for I had no idea that the captain had a daughter, or that he was so anxious to conceal the fact that he was a privateer; but no power on earth now, not even that of the captain himself, can prevent those devilish sailors from coming here in search of him if he does not go to them, so you had better tell him, in any case, that the ship's officers and a part of the crew are waiting for him at the tavern known as The Golden Anchor on the quay."

The ship owner hastened off and Segoffin darted into the house to inquire if there was any improvement in Sabine's condition.

CHAPTER XVIII.

“MY MOTHER’S MURDERER STILL LIVES.”

SEGOFFIN had been pacing the hall out of which Sabine’s sitting-room opened for about half an hour with ever-increasing anxiety before Suzanne came out.

“Well, how is mademoiselle?” he asked, anxiously.
“Tell me, Suzanne, how is she?”

“A nice question to ask, truly, when your brutality toward that estimable gentleman this morning threw mademoiselle into a frightful nervous spasm.”

“I admit that I did very wrong, but she had got over that. M. Yvon told me so when he came out into the garden. What happened afterward to upset her so again?”

“Alas! the one great sorrow of her life has been recalled to her remembrance more vividly than ever!”

“You refer to her poor mother’s death, of course.”

“Yes, and she has just been talking to M. Yvon about it. You can judge how painful the conversation must have been to him.”

“What do you mean?” cried Segoffin, in alarm. “Is it possible that Mlle. Sabine knows that terrible secret?”

“No, thank Heaven! she does not, and I sincerely hope she never will.”

“I do not understand you then, Suzanne.”

“This is what caused all the trouble,” said the house-keeper, drawing a paper from her pocket.

“What is that?”

“The morning paper. It contains further details in

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relation to that famous privateer, Captain l'Endurci. Listen to what it says, and you will then understand the situation."

And opening the paper, Suzanne read the following extract from an article headed, "Further Particulars in Relation to the Famous Corsair, Captain l'Endurci :"

"The captain's personal appearance is well calculated to increase his prestige, and each and every one of his men would willingly follow him to the death.

"This intrepid corsair is about forty years of age. Though only of medium height, he is remarkably agile and robust; his physiognomy is both virile and expressive; his eagle eye, the imperious carriage of his head, and his resolute bearing all show him to be a man born to command. His real name and origin is shrouded in mystery, but many persons are of the opinion that he is a native of Brittany, basing the supposition upon the costume he always wears on shipboard. Others think the captain came from some southern province, and that he adopted the Breton costume merely from motives of convenience.

"However that may be, we are sure our readers will peruse with interest a description of the costume this famous corsair always wears on shipboard; in fact, it is even said that he attaches a superstitious importance to the wearing of this garb, which consists of a long black jacket and waistcoat trimmed with small silver buttons, a broad orange sash into which his weapons are thrust, wide white linen trousers similar to the *morphs* worn by the fishermen of Holland and the pilots of the island of Batz, high leggings, and a low, broad-brimmed felt hat."

After having read this extract the housekeeper remarked: "You see, Segoffin, that this corsair wears a costume which is identical in every respect with that worn by M. Cloarek on the night of madame's deplorable death."

"Yes; it makes me shudder to think of it," exclaimed

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Segoffin, interrupting her, "and on reading it, I suppose Mlle. Cloarek fancied she saw in this corsair the mysterious personage who was the cause of her mother's death."

"Alas! yes, Segoffin, and she said to monsieur, in a sort of frenzy: 'Father, my mother's murderer still lives. Will you not avenge her?' You can imagine M. Cloarek's feelings. To undecieve his daughter he would have to accuse himself."

"Mademoiselle must have read the papers after M. Yvon's return, then, I suppose."

"Yes, monsieur came in about eleven o'clock. He looked radiant; my nephew, who was with him, also seemed to be in the best of spirits. 'Is my daughter in her room?' asked monsieur, gaily. 'I have some good news for her.' Though I am no talebearer, there was nothing for me to do but tell him about the altercation you and the worthy merchant had had in the garden, and how much it had terrified mademoiselle."

"Of course, but go on."

"Monsieur ran up to his daughter's room and found that she had almost entirely recovered from her attack. Soon afterward, Thérèse brought up the paper as usual, and I, unfortunately, thinking it would divert mademoiselle, gave it to her to read. When she came to the passage in which the privateer's peculiar costume was described, she uttered a terrible cry — But hush! here comes monsieur," exclaimed Suzanne, hastily.

Cloarek, with an expression of the gloomiest despair imprinted on his features, and as pale as death, had just come out of his daughter's room.

"Go to her, Suzanne, she is asking for you," he said, hoarsely. "Come with me, Segoffin."

Segoffin silently followed his employer into his bedroom, where Cloarek, throwing himself into an armchair, buried his face in his hands and groaned aloud.

On beholding this poignant grief, Segoffin felt his own

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eyes grow moist as he stood silent and motionless beside his master.

"I can not understand how the recollection of that terrible night impressed itself so deeply on that unfortunate child's memory," exclaimed Cloarek, at last. "I shudder still as I think with what an expression of horror she exclaimed, 'Father, father, my mother's murderer still lives.' And as I gazed at her in a sort of stupor without replying, she added, with all the energy of intense hatred, 'Father, I tell you that the man who killed my mother, the man who killed your wife, still lives. Her murder cries for vengeance, and this man still lives.' And for the first time I saw an expression of hatred on my daughter's gentle face, and I was the object of that hatred. This terrible scene has reopened the wound again and revived my remorse, and yet you know how much I have suffered, and how bitterly I have expiated that momentary madness."

"But the worst thing, after all, is this scheme of Verduron's, M. Yvon," responded Segoffin, after a moment's silence.

"Yes, it is enough to drive one mad, for if I remain with my daughter the crew is sure to come here."

"That is absolutely certain. You know our men."

"Yes, and Sabine will then learn that her father, Captain l'Endurci, and her mother's murderer are all one and the same person, and this child, upon whom I have concentrated all my affection for years,—this child who is my only hope and joy and consolation in life,—will feel for me henceforth only aversion and loathing."

Then, after a few moments of gloomy reflection, he murmured, his eyes wild, his lips contracted in a sardonic smile:

"But nonsense! she is rich; she loves an honourable man, who loves her in return. She will still have Suzanne and Segoffin. Instead of loathing me, she shall mourn for me, and, so far as she is concerned, my

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death shall be enshrouded in the same mystery as my life.”

As he spoke Cloarek stepped toward a table on which a pair of pistols were lying; but Segoffin, who had not once taken his eyes off his employer, sprang forward and, seizing the pistols before the captain could reach them, removed the charge and coolly replaced the weapons.

“Wretch!” exclaimed Cloarek, seizing Segoffin by the collar, and shaking him violently, “you shall pay dearly for your audacity.”

“Time presses, M. Yvon, and you have more important business on hand than shaking poor old Segoffin. Your time is too precious for that!”

The head gunner’s coolness restored Cloarek to himself, and sinking despondently into a chair, he said, gloomily:

“You are right, I am a fool. What shall I do? My brain seems to be on fire.”

“Do you really want to know what I think you had better do?”

“Yes.”

“I think you had better go to Havre immediately.”

“Leave Sabine in this condition? Increase her alarm by a hasty departure and an incomprehensible absence after all my promises to her? Abandon her when she needs my care and affection more than ever before,—at the time she is about to marry, in short?”

“Mlle. Sabine?”

“Yes, the idea of this marriage was not at all pleasing to me at first, but now I feel confident that my daughter’s future will prove a happy one; still, I ought to guide these children and surround them with the tenderest paternal solicitude, and it is at a time like this that I must put to sea again, and again risk my life now that it has become more necessary than ever to Sabine. I have recovered my senses now, and realise how mad I was to think of killing myself just now.

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Thanks to you, my tried and faithful friend, I have been saved from that crime."

"I wish I could save you from the visit of our ship's crew as well, M. Yvon. You must not forget that danger. If you do not go to them, they will surely come to you."

"Then I will go to them," exclaimed Cloarek, as if a way out of the difficulty had suddenly presented itself to his mind. "Yes, I will go to Havre at once, and tell my men that I have abandoned the sea, and that it will be useless for them to attempt to coerce me. You know how determined I am, and how little likelihood there is that I shall yield to overpersuasion. You shall accompany me. You have considerable influence over them, and you must exert it in my behalf. It is the only means of averting the danger that threatens me. It is now two o'clock, by three we shall be in Havre, and back home again by five. My daughter is lying down, and will not even suspect my absence. To avert suspicion, we will take a carriage at the inn."

Cloarek had already started toward the door, when the head gunner checked him by saying:

"You are making a great mistake in one respect, M. Yvon."

"What do you mean?"

"If you go to Havre you will not return here until after the cruise is ended."

"You are mad."

"No, I am not mad."

"You think my crew will carry me away by force, do you?"

"It is very probable. Besides, when you are with the sailors again, you will not have the strength to resist them."

"I will not?"

"No."

"Not after the reasons I have just stated to you? I

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shall be back here by five o’clock, I tell you, and before my daughter has even discovered my absence. Your fears are absurd. Come, I say.”

“ You insist ?”

“ Yes, I do.”

“ That which is to be, will be,” said Segoffin, shaking his head dubiously, but following his employer for all that.

After inquiring how Sabine was feeling, and learning that she had fallen asleep, Cloarek started for Havre in company with his head gunner.

CHAPTER XIX.

AFTER THE STORM.

THREE days have elapsed since Yvon Cloarek left his home without notifying his daughter of his intended departure, and this once pleasant and tranquil abode shows traces of recent devastation almost everywhere.

One of the out-buildings have been almost entirely destroyed by fire, and pieces of blackened rubbish and half-burned rafters cover a part of the garden.

The door and several windows on the ground floor, which have been shattered by an axe, have been replaced by boards; several large red stains disfigure the walls, and several of the sashes in the second story have been riddled with shot.

It is midnight.

By the light of a shaded lamp burning in one of the sleeping apartments, one can dimly discern the form of Onésime, and the sheets of the bed on which he is lying are stained with blood in several places.

Suzanne's nephew seems to be asleep. His face is death-like in its pallor, and a melancholy smile is playing upon his parted lips.

An elderly woman in peasant garb is sitting by his bedside, watching him with evident solicitude.

The profound silence that pervades the room is broken by the cautious opening and shutting of the door, and Dame Roberts steals on tiptoe up to the bed, and, drawing one of the curtains a little aside, gazes in upon her nephew with great anxiety.

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In three days Suzanne's features have become almost unrecognisable,—sorrow, anxiety, and tears have wrought such ravages in them.

After gazing at Onésime in silence for several seconds, Suzanne stepped back, and, beckoning the attendant to come closer, said to her, in a whisper:

“How has he been since I went out?”

“He hasn't seemed to suffer quite as much, I think.”

“Has he complained at all?”

“Very little. He has tried to question me several times, but I remembered your orders and would tell him nothing.”

“He has recovered consciousness, then?”

“Entirely, madame. It is very evident that he would be glad enough to talk, if he could get any one to answer his questions.”

“Has he asked for me?”

“Oh, yes, madame, he said to me several times: ‘My aunt will be in soon, won't she?’ I told him that you came in almost every half-hour. He made a slight movement of the head to indicate that he thanked me, and then he fell asleep, but only to wake with a start a few minutes afterward.”

“He doesn't seem to suffer much from his wound now, does he?”

“No, madame, only he has had considerable difficulty in breathing once or twice.”

“Heaven grant that his wound may not prove fatal!” exclaimed Suzanne, clasping her hands imploringly, and raising her tearful eyes heavenward.

“The surgeon assured you to the contrary, you know, madame.”

“He told me that he had hopes of his recovery, that is all, alas!”

“I think he is waking, madame,” whispered the peasant woman, for Onésime had just made a slight movement and uttered a deep sigh.

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Suzanne peeped in again, and, seeing that Onésime was not asleep, she said to the peasant :

" Go down and get your dinner. I will ring for you when I want you."

The nurse left the room, and Suzanne seated herself in the chair the woman had just vacated.

On hearing his aunt's voice, Onésime looked greatly relieved ; and when he saw her seat herself near him, he exclaimed :

" So you have come at last ! How glad I am ! "

" I heard you sigh just now, my dear boy, so you must still be suffering just as much or more, I fear."

" No ; I feel much better."

" You are not saying that merely to reassure me, I hope."

" Take hold of my hand. You know how hot it was awhile ago."

" Yes, it is much cooler now, I see. And your wound, does it still trouble you much ? "

" I have a little difficulty in breathing, that is all. The wound itself doesn't amount to much."

" Good Heavens ! so a wound in the breast from a dagger is nothing, is it ? "

" My dear aunt — "

" What do you want ? "

" How is Mlle. Sabine ? "

" Everybody is well, very well, as I've told you before."

" And M. Cloarek ? "

" There is no use in asking me so many questions. I sha'n't answer them. By and by, when you are really better, it will be different."

" Listen, aunt. You refuse to answer me for fear of agitating me too much, but I swear to you that the uncertainty I am in concerning Mlle. Sabine and M. Cloarek makes me miserable."

" Everybody is getting on very well, I tell you."

AFTER THE STORM.

"No, aunt, no, that is impossible, after the terrible and still inexplicable occurrence that—"

"But, my dear nephew, I assure you — Come, come, don't be so impatient. Can't you be a little more reasonable? Calm yourself, Onésime, I beg of you!"

"Is it my fault? Why will you persist in keeping me in such a state of suspense?"

"Don't I keep telling you that everybody is well?"

"But I tell you that is impossible," exclaimed the young man, excitedly. "What! do you mean to tell me that Mlle. Sabine, who starts and trembles at the slightest sound, could see her home invaded by a furious band of armed men, without sustaining a terrible, perhaps fatal, shock?"

"But, Onésime, listen to me —"

"Who knows but she may be dead, dead, and you are concealing it from me? You think you are acting for the best, aunt, but you are mistaken. The truth, no matter how terrible it may be, will do me much less harm than this state of frightful uncertainty. Sleeping and waking, I am a prey to the most terrible fears. I would a hundred times rather be dead than live in this state of suspense."

"Listen, then, but promise to be reasonable and have courage."

"Courage? Ah, I knew that some terrible calamity had occurred."

"Dear me! I knew it would be just this way whatever I said or did!" cried poor Suzanne. "You see yourself that at the very first word I say to you —"

"Oh, my God! I had a presentiment of it. She is dead!"

"No, no, she is living, she is living. I swear it! She has suffered terribly, — she has been alarmingly ill, but her life is no longer in danger."

"It has been in danger, then?"

"Yes, for two days, but I have just seen her and

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talked with her, and there is no longer cause for the slightest anxiety."

"God be thanked!" exclaimed Onésime, fervently. "And how much I thank you, too, my dear aunt. Ah, if you knew how much good you have done me, and how relieved I feel. Is M. Cloarek here?"

"No."

"Where is he?"

"We do not know."

"But that fatal night—"

"He came home, and was slightly wounded in the fray, but no one has seen him since."

"And that strange attack upon the house, those frightful but incomprehensible words which were uttered by Mlle. Sabine, and which I seemed to hear as in a dream after I was hurt. These things puzzle me so. Explain them, I beg of you."

"In your present state of mind I can see that a refusal on my part might prove dangerous."

"Yes, very dangerous."

"But I repeat that you must have courage, for—"

"I will, aunt, I will."

"You remember, do you not, that on the afternoon of that memorable day, M. Cloarek, who had left for Havre without our knowing it, sent a message to his daughter from that city telling her that she must not be anxious about him, as some business matters might detain him until late that night? You recollect that, do you not?"

"Yes."

"You remember, too, the fright we had the very evening of M. Cloarek's arrival?"

"Yes, about those two men Thérèse thought she saw."

"The poor girl saw them only too plainly, as subsequent events have proved, for two men, as we afterward learned, did effect an entrance into the garden, not to break into the house, but to reconnoitre."

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"The two men belonged to this armed band, then, I suppose."

"One of them was the leader of it."

Just then the nurse reentered the room and motioned to Suzanne that she wished to speak to her.

"What is it?" inquired Suzanne, in a low tone.

"M. Segoffin has come."

"And M. Cloarek?"

"M. Segoffin is alone and wants to see Mlle. Sabine at once. Thérèse went up to tell her, and she sent word for him to come right up to her room."

"Tell mademoiselle that I will come at once if she needs me."

The nurse left the room again, and Suzanne returned to her nephew's bedside to continue her conversation with him.

CHAPTER XX.

THE MIDNIGHT ATTACK.

“ It was no bad news that they came to tell you just now, was it, aunt ? ” inquired Onésime, as Suzanne reseated herself near him.

“ Oh, no ; I will tell you what it was presently. Let me go on with my story. You recollect Thérèse running in to tell us that the stable was on fire, and that a band of armed men were attacking the house ? ”

“ Yes, yes ; what a terrible night it was ! ”

“ I shall never forget the mingled terror and admiration I felt at the courage you displayed. I can hear you saying now : ‘ Flight is impossible ; I cannot preserve you from danger, my infirmity, alas ! prevents that, but I can at least make a rampart of my body for your protection ; ’ and, arming yourself with an iron bar wrenched from one of the shutters, you rushed to the door, and alone and unaided guarded the entrance to the room with truly supernatural courage and strength.”

“ Don’t speak of that, my dear aunt. Really, I — ”

“ What ! not speak of it when the recollection of your bravery and devotion is the only consolation I have when I see you lying here. No, the most determined resistance I ever read of paled beside yours. Entrenched in the doorway, the iron bar became a formidable weapon in your hands, and though your defective vision prevented you from aiming your blows very accurately, those who came within reach of your arm fell at your feet, one by one.”

THE MIDNIGHT ATTACK.

"How terrified Mlle. Sabine must have been! Timid as she is, she must have died a thousand deaths during that brief struggle."

"You are very much mistaken, my friend. The courage and strength of character she displayed in that trying hour amazed me. I can see her now standing there pale but resolute. Her first words were: 'Thank God, I shall die alone, my father is absent.' Then, pointing to you, she said, exultantly: 'Do you admit that he is brave now? He is confronting death unflinchingly for our sakes, but we shall at least perish with him.' And when, overpowered, by numbers, you were at last struck down, and four of the men, the leader with his arm in a sling, burst into the room, she showed even greater heroism. 'Onésime is dead!' she exclaimed. 'It is our turn now! Farewell, Suzanne,' she added, clasping me in her arms, and murmuring, softly, 'Farewell, dear father, farewell.'"

"Loving and courageous to the last!" exclaimed Onésime, with tears both in his voice and eyes.

"I felt much less resigned. I had just seen you fall bleeding across the threshold, and I threw myself at the feet of the leader, begging for mercy. With a gesture he commanded the men to pause, and then, turning to me, demanded, in a threatening voice: 'Where is Captain l'Endurci ?'"

"Captain l'Endurci ?" repeated Onésime, in great surprise. "Why did they come here to look for Captain l'Endurci ? Besides, these men were Englishmen. I remember now."

"I will explain presently. When the leader of the party asked where Captain l'Endurci was, I replied: 'This house belongs to M. Cloarek. He is absent from home. This is his daughter. Have pity on her.'

"His daughter!" exclaimed the man, with a ferocious laugh. "So this is his daughter, is it? So much the better! And you,—are you his wife?"

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“‘ No, I am only the housekeeper.’

“‘ So this is his daughter,’ he repeated again, approaching poor mademoiselle, whose courage seemed to increase with the danger, for, with both hands crossed upon her breast, like a saint, she looked the leader of the bandits straight in the eye.

“‘ Where is your father?’ he demanded.

“‘ A long way from here, thank God!’ replied the poor child, bravely.

“‘ Your father arrived here yesterday. He can hardly have gone away again so soon. He must be somewhere about the house. Where is he? Where is he, I say?’

“ And as Sabine remained silent, he continued, with a sardonic smile :

“‘ I have missed your father, it seems, but, by taking you, I shall get him sooner or later. You shall write to him from England, telling him where you are, and he will incur any risk to release you. I shall be waiting for him, and so capture him sooner or later. Come with me.’

“‘ Go with you? I would rather die,’ exclaimed Sabine.

“‘ No one has any intention of killing you, but you have got to come, so you had better do so peaceably, and not compel us to resort to force.’

“‘ Never!’ cried the poor girl.

“ The scoundrel turned to his men, and said a few words to them, whereupon they sprung upon Sabine. I tried to defend her, but they dragged me away, and, in spite of her tears and cries, she was soon securely bound. They had scarcely done this before the report of firearms and loud shouts were heard outside. Two men came rushing in, and said a few words to their leader, who quickly followed them out of the room. All the men except those who were holding Sabine hurried out after him. Then, and not until then, was I able to approach you. I thought at first that you were dead, so,

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forgetting Sabine and everything else, I was sobbing over you, when, suddenly — ” Suzanne paused for a moment overcome with emotion.

“ Go on ! Oh, go on, I beg of you ! ” exclaimed Onésime.

“ Never shall I forget that scene. At the farther end of the room two of the wretches were trying to drag Sabine along, in spite of her despairing cries. The other two men, evidently frightened by the increasing uproar outside, darted to the door, but just as they reached it both were struck down in turn by a terrific blow from an axe. A moment afterward Sabine’s captors shared the same fate.”

“ But who struck them down ? ”

“ Who ? ” exclaimed Suzanne, with a shudder, and lowering her voice. “ A man clad in a strange costume. He wore a long, black jacket and waistcoat, a broad-brimmed hat, and full, white trousers. Axe in hand, he had just burst into the room, followed by several sailors.”

“ It seems to me that I have heard Mlle. Sabine speak of some other man dressed in a similar manner who, she said, was her mother’s murderer.”

“ Alas ! this recollection was only too vivid in her mind,” said Suzanne, sadly.

“ But who was the man that came to Mlle. Sabine’s assistance, clad in this way ? ”

“ This man was the famous privateer, Captain l’Endrei,— this man was M. Cloarek ! ”

“ M. Cloarek ! Impossible ! ” exclaimed Onésime, raising himself up in bed, in spite of his weakness.

“ Yes, he had an axe in his hand. His garments were covered with blood ; his face, never, oh, never, have I beheld a face so terrible. When he came in, Sabine, not distinguishing his features at first, uttered a cry of horror, and exclaimed, ‘ The black man ! The black man ! ’ and when M. Cloarek ran to his daughter, she recoiled

in terror, crying, ‘Father, ah, father, then it was you who killed my mother !’ and fell apparently lifeless upon the floor.”

“ Yes, yes, those words, ‘ Father, then it was you who killed my mother,’ I heard them vaguely, as life seemed to be deserting me. Oh, this is frightful, frightful ! What a horrible discovery ! What misery it entails ! Such a tender father and loving daughter to have such a gulf between them for ever ! You were right, aunt, you were right ! It does indeed require courage to bear such a revelation. And Mlle. Sabine, how has she been since that time ?”

“ The unfortunate child lay between life and death for two whole days, as I told you.”

“ And M. Cloarek ?”

“ Alas ! we know nothing about him. On hearing his daughter reproach him for her mother’s death, he uttered a loud cry, and rushed out of the room like one demented, and nothing has been seen of him since.”

“ How unfortunate ! Great Heavens, how unfortunate ! But how did M. Cloarek hear of this intended attack ?”

“ It seems this party had made two or three similar descents at different points along the coast ; but this attack was unquestionably made in the hope of capturing M. Cloarek, who, under the name of Captain l’Endurci, had inflicted such injury upon the British navy.”

The nurse, reëntering the room at that moment, said to Suzanne :

“ Madame Roberts, M. Segoffin wishes to speak to you, as well as to M. Onésime, if he feels able to see him.”

“ Certainly,” responded the young man, promptly.

Segoffin entered the room almost immediately. Dame Roberts did not receive him with ironical words and looks, as she had been wont to do, however. On the contrary, she advanced to meet him with affectionate eagerness.

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"Well, my dear Segoffin, is your news good or bad?" she exclaimed.

"I hardly know, my dear Suzanne. It will all depend upon this," he sighed, drawing a bulky envelope from his pocket as he spoke.

"What is that?"

"A letter from M. Cloarek."

"He is alive, then, thank Heaven!"

"Yes, and his only remaining hope is in this letter, and I am to give the letter to you, M. Onésime."

"To me?"

"And I am to tell you what you are to do with it. But first let me ask if you feel able to get up?"

"Yes, oh, yes!" exclaimed the young man, making a quick movement.

"And I say you are not. It would be exceedingly imprudent in you, Onésime," cried his aunt.

"Excuse me, Suzanne," interposed Segoffin. "I am as much opposed to anything like imprudence as you can possibly be, but (I can confess it now, you see) as I have had considerable experience in injuries of this kind during the last twelve years, I am probably much better able to judge than you are, so I am going to feel your nephew's pulse and note his symptoms carefully, and if I find him able to go down to the parlour where Mlle. Sabine is, I— No, no, not so fast!" added Segoffin, laying a restraining hand on Onésime, who, upon hearing Sabine's name, had evinced an evident intention of springing out of bed. "I have not made my diagnosis yet. Do me the favour to keep quiet. If you don't, I will take the letter away, and lock you up here in your room."

Onésime sighed, but submitted with breathless impatience to Segoffin's careful examination, made with the aid of a lamp held by Suzanne, an examination which satisfied him that the young man could sit up an hour or two without the slightest danger.

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" You are positive there is no danger, Segoffin ? " asked Dame Roberts, anxiously.

" None whatever."

" But why not postpone this conference for awhile ? "

" Because there is a person counting the hours, nay, the very minutes, until he hears from us."

" You mean M. Cloarek, do you not ? "

" I tell you there is some one not far from here to whom this decision means life or death," said Segoffin, without answering the question.

" Life or death ! " cried Suzanne.

" Or rather hope or despair," added Segoffin, gravely, " and that is why, Suzanne, I ask your nephew to make the effort to go down-stairs. Now, if you will go to mademoiselle, I will help M. Onésime dress."

Ten minutes afterward Onésime, leaning on Segoffin's arm, entered the little parlour where Sabine was awaiting him.

CHAPTER XXI.

A LAST APPEAL.

THE poor girl was as pale as death, and so weak that she was obliged to half recline in a large easy-chair.

"Will you sit down, M. Onésime, and you too, my dear Suzanne and Segoffin," she said, with gentle dignity.

They all seated themselves in silence.

"Before beginning this conversation," said Sabine, with a melancholy smile, "I must tell you that I am greatly changed. The vague and often senseless fears which have haunted me from infancy seem to have vanished. The terrible reality seems to have dispelled these phantoms. I tell you this, my friends, so you may understand that it is no longer necessary to manifest so much caution and consideration in your treatment of me, and that you can tell me the entire truth with safety, no matter how terrible it may be. One word more: I adjure you, Suzanne, and you too, Segoffin, in the name of your devotion to me and to — other members of my family, to answer all my questions fully and truthfully. Will you promise to do this?"

"I promise," replied Suzanne.

"I promise," said Segoffin.

A brief silence followed.

All present, and more especially Onésime, were struck by the firm and resolute manner in which Sabine expressed herself, and felt that, whatever her decision might be, it would unquestionably prove unalterable.

"You saw me born, Suzanne," continued the young

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girl, after a moment, "and by your untiring care and faithful devotion you made yourself my mother's valued friend. It is in the name of this friendship that I adjure you to tell me if the memories of my infancy have deceived me, and if it was not my father who, twelve years ago, dressed as I saw him three days ago, caused — caused my mother's death."

"Alas! mademoiselle —"

"In the name of my sainted mother, I adjure you to tell me the truth, Suzanne."

"The truth is, mademoiselle," replied the housekeeper, in a trembling voice, "the truth is, that, after a stormy scene between your parents, madame died; but —"

"Enough, my dear Suzanne," said Sabine, interrupting her. Then, passing her hand across her burning brow, she relapsed into a gloomy silence that no one dared to break.

"Segoffin," she said, at last, "you were my grandfather's faithful servant and trusted friend. You watched over my father in childhood; at all times, and under all circumstances, you have been blindly devoted to him. Is it true that my father, instead of being engaged in business as he said, has been privateering under the name of Captain l'Endurei?"

"Yes, mademoiselle, it is true," Segoffin answered, smothering a sigh.

After another brief silence, Sabine said :

"M. Onésime, I owe it to myself and I owe it to you to inform you of my determination. In happier days there was some talk of a marriage between us, but after what has occurred, after what you know and have just heard, you will not be surprised, I think, to hear me say that this world is no longer any place for me."

"Good Heavens! what do you mean, mademoiselle?" cried Onésime, in dismay.

"I have decided to retire to a convent, where I intend to end my days."

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Onésime did not utter a word, but sat with his head bowed upon his breast, while quick, heavy sobs shook his frame.

"No, mademoiselle, no! That is impossible," sobbed Suzanne. "No, surely you will not thus bury yourself alive."

"My mind is made up," answered Sabine, firmly; "but if such a sojourn does not seem too gloomy to you, my dear Suzanne, I should be glad to have you accompany me."

"I shall never leave you. You know that very well, mademoiselle, but you will not do this, you will not—"

"Suzanne, for two days I have been reflecting upon the course I ought to pursue. There is nothing else for me to do, so my resolution is irrevocable."

"And your father, mademoiselle," interposed Segoffin, "before you separate yourself from him for ever you will surely see him once more."

"No."

"Then, from this day on, you are dead to him and he is dead to you."

It was evidently with a violent effort at self-control that Sabine at last replied:

"It will be better for me not to see my father again until we are reunited with my mother."

"Ah, mademoiselle, how can you be so cruel?" murmured Segoffin, despairingly. "If you knew how wretched he is—"

"No, I am not cruel," replied the girl; "at least I do not mean to be. I can only repeat what I said to Suzanne just now. For two days I have been reflecting on the course I ought to pursue, and my decision is irrevocable."

A gloomy silence greeted this announcement. Segoffin was the first to speak.

"You surely will not refuse to hear a letter from M. Cloarek read, mademoiselle," he said, at last. "It

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is the only request he makes of you, for he foresaw the aversion you would feel for him."

"Aversion!" cried Sabine, like one in mortal agony. Then controlling herself, she added:

"There seems to have been a strange and cruel fatality about all this."

"Yes," answered the old servant, sighing; "but as M. Cloarek is never to see you again, will you not at least listen to the letter I brought to M. Onésime?"

"It is undoubtedly my duty to comply with my father's wishes, so I am ready to listen, M. Onésime."

The young man opened the envelope Segoffin handed him. The letter which Cloarek had written to his daughter was accompanied with the following brief note:

"I implore you to read the enclosed letter to Sabine, my dear Onésime. It is a last proof of esteem and affection I desire to give you.

"May this truthful account written by a despairing parent, and read by a beloved voice, reach his daughter's heart.

Yours affectionately,

"Y. CLOAREK."

After telling Sabine the contents of this note the young man read the following aloud:

"To MY DAUGHTER: — Fate seems to decree that I am to be separated from you for ever, my child, for now I know you can no longer bear the sight of me.

"A strange and unforeseen event has revealed a terrible and jealously guarded secret to you.

"Yes, that man in the strange costume, whom you have always remembered as your mother's murderer, was I, your father.

"The privateer whose deeds inspired you with such horror was I.

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“Your mother was *enceinte*. We had a quarrel,—the first in our whole married life, I swear it! I gave way to my temper, and my anger became so terrible that, in your mother’s nervous condition, her fright killed her.

“Mine was a double crime, for the terror that proved fatal to your mother also had a lasting effect upon you, for the unfortunate impression made upon you at that tender age had a most deplorable influence, not only upon your health, but upon your whole life.

“You know my crime, now let me tell you how I have expiated it.

“When I saw you motherless, I asked myself what would become of you.

“The small fortune that your mother and I possessed had been almost entirely lost in consequence of the political agitations of the day and a ruinous lawsuit. I had lost my position as a magistrate in consequence of the scandal which my ebullitions of temper caused.

“I sold the small amount of property I had left, and realised about six thousand francs from the sale. Suzanne, who had gained your poor mother’s affectionate esteem by her virtues and her faithfulness, was devoted to you. I said to her :

““Here are five thousand francs; enough, with economy, to supply my daughter’s wants and yours for five years. I entrust my child to your care. If you have seen or heard nothing from me at the expiration of these five years, you will send a letter which I will leave with you to the person to whom it is addressed.”

“The person to whom this letter was written was a man of noble lineage whose life I had saved during the revolution, and who had taken up his abode in Germany; and I felt sure that this man, who was still wealthy, would treat you as an adopted child; but I did not intend you to eat the bitter bread of dependence if I could help it.

“These arrangements made, I kissed you while you

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were peacefully sleeping, and departed with one thousand francs as my only dependence. Segoffin, my tried and trusted friend, insisted upon sharing my fortunes, so he accompanied me.

“I had devoted the days which immediately preceded my departure to sorrowful meditations upon the future and the past, during which I had questioned, studied, and judged myself with inexorable severity.

“My misfortunes and my crime toward your mother were due to the impetuosity of my character. Anything that wounded my feelings, anything contradictory to my convictions, anything in the way of opposition to my wishes, made my blood boil and excited me almost to frenzy; and this exuberance and impetuosity vented themselves in fury and violence.

“In short, my only capital was anger.

“While thus studying myself I recollect the wonderful mental and physical power with which I seemed to be endowed when I yielded to these transports of rage.

“Often when I had revolted against certain iniquitous facts or acts of cruel oppression, the very intensity of my anger had given me almost superhuman power to defend the weak and chastise the oppressor. For instance, one day when I found three russians attacking a poor defenceless woman, I nearly killed all three of them, though in my normal condition I could not have coped successfully with any one of them single-handed.

“But alas! my child, on continuing this inexorable study of myself, I was also obliged to admit that I had not always had just cause for my anger, by any means, for not unfrequently the slightest contradiction infuriated me almost to madness. Your poor mother's death was a terrible example of this idiosyncrasy on my part.

“After this long and careful examination of myself, I summed up the result as follows:

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““ Anger is a passion of such intensity in me, that it increases my mental and physical powers a hundred-fold. In other words, it is a force.

““ When this force is brought into action by generous motives, it leads to acts of which I have every reason to be proud.

““ When, on the contrary, it is brought into action by unworthy motives, it causes me to commit culpable or even criminal acts, which I shall never cease to regret.

““ Anger has been the cause of my ruin and of my despair. It killed my wife. Now, anger shall be my salvation and the salvation of my daughter.

““ These words may seem incomprehensible to you, my child, but listen.

““ In my position of magistrate, my proneness to anger and violence was most prejudicial to me. It caused people to regard me with derision, even with contempt, and destroyed every prospect of my advancement in my judicial career. In other words, my mind, character, and temperament did not harmonise with my functions.

““ It was consequently advisable for me to adopt a profession in which the vice, or rather, the radical force of my nature could be utilised to the best advantage of myself and of others.

““ I soon found such a profession.

““ My grandfather had been a sea-faring man, like nearly all Bretons who live on the coast; but my father’s rather delicate health led him to enter the judiciary. But I had been reared on the coast, and the sight of the sea, and the daring, adventurous, and independent life of the fishermen had made a deep impression upon my mind.

““ A privateer! to be a privateer! When this idea presented itself to my mind my heart bounded with hope.

““ It seemed to amount to a revelation.

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“‘ It offered an outlet for the feverish ardour that was devouring me.

“‘ My one object in life now was to save you from poverty, and ensure you the comforts of life, both now and in years to come,—to secure sufficient wealth to make it possible for you to marry the man of your choice, some day. This, and to find a career in which my powers could be best utilised.

“‘ How could I do this more effectually than by becoming a privateer ?

“‘ The prize-money gained by privateers often amounts to large sums, so it was quite possible that I might succeed in amassing a very comfortable little fortune for you ; besides, where could I hope to find a life that would suit me better, or even as well as the daring, exciting, adventurous life of a corsair ?

“‘ Contention and strife were like the breath of life to me. Resistance exasperated me to frenzy ; peril only incited me to greater efforts ; the presence of danger set my blood to boiling. Madness seized me, and my capabilities seemed to increase in power in proportion to the number of my enemies.

“‘ Nor was this all, my child. As I have remarked before, cruelty, or oppression, or treachery, enraged me well-nigh to madness, and against whom should I fight if I became a corsair ? Against a country I abhorred, — against a country that, impelled by hatred, greed, or ambition, as the case might be, had pursued France with the utmost vindictiveness for years, hesitating at nothing, — now trying to ruin us by flooding our country with counterfeit assignats, now torturing our brave soldiers to madness, even to death, in her horrible prison hulks, — in short, *England* !

“‘ *England* ! In spite of the despair that overwhelms me as I write, the mere name of that country (which I hate with an even more mortal hatred since the dastardly attempt of which you so narrowly escaped becom-

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ing the victim) brings a hot flush of anger to my cheek ; my wrath kindles again, and —

“ ‘ But forgive me, forgive me, my poor child, forgive me for thus grieving your tender and ingenuous heart, which is incapable of aught like hatred.

“ ‘ I did feel it necessary, however, to explain all the reasons that actuated me in entering upon the only career that seemed open to me.

“ ‘ My decision made, I kissed you farewell while you were sleeping, and departed in company with Segoffin.’ ”

Onésime’s reading was here interrupted by a despairing sob that Sabine could no longer repress.

CHAPTER XXII.

CONCLUSION.

SABINE had been deeply touched by the opening paragraphs of her father's letter.

Cloarek's simple and straightforward confession, his deep remorse at the ebullition of temper which had been the cause of his wife's death, his resolve to expiate his faults, or, rather, to make them assist in ensuring his daughter's future happiness, the paternal love which dominated every word and deed, all combined to arouse a feeling of tender commiseration for misfortunes which had been due, in a great measure, at least, to peculiarities of temperament; and seeing the strong impression that had been made on the young girl, the others saw a ray of hope.

Segoffin and the housekeeper exchanged inquiring glances, but seemed to silently agree that it would be advisable to make no comment, but leave Sabine to the influence of her own reflections.

But after a few moments, Suzanne, leaning toward her nephew, whispered in his ear :

“All is not lost yet. Go on, go on, my dear Onésime.” So Onésime continued as follows:

“‘ Segoffin and I went to Dieppe, where we shipped as common sailors on a privateer, for we realised that we must both serve an apprenticeship at our new trade. We made several voyages in that capacity. In my

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leisure moments I studied mathematics and the art of navigation assiduously, so I should be able to command a vessel myself when the necessary practical knowledge had been acquired.

“ ‘ My apprenticeship lasted two years, during which we were engaged in a number of bloody conflicts. At the end of that time I was offered the position of mate aboard a well-known privateer. After eighteen months spent in this way, I had become so well known that a ship owner offered me the command of a vessel called the *Hell-hound*, that he was fitting out.

“ ‘ Strange to say, I was never wounded, though I took part in so many desperate conflicts. I received my first wound on coming to your assistance the other night.

“ ‘ I dare not tell you the cause to which I attribute this singular immunity from danger. I should be obliged to mention your mother’s name, and that would revive your grief, and possibly it is only a superstitious fancy, after all.

“ ‘ Fate has not been equally kind to Segoffin, unfortunately. He has received several wounds, and, in boarding a vessel during our last fight, he lost an eye by a blow from a pike. No words could do justice to this worthy man’s wonderful devotion. I no longer regard him as a servant, but as a friend.

“ ‘ One more brief explanation, my child.

“ ‘ I knew your affection for me. I knew, too, that your nervous system had received a severe shock at the time of your poor mother’s death, so I resolved to save you from constant anxiety by concealing my real occupation from you. So it was agreed between Segoffin and me that we should explain our frequent absences by pretending that we were travelling around the country selling dry goods. I also arranged that the letters you sent to the different towns agreed upon should be forwarded to Dieppe.

“ ‘ When I returned after a cruise, I got these letters,

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and dated my replies from different towns, where I had previously arranged to have them mailed.

“Such were some of the many precautions that I was obliged to take to conceal the truth from you and allay any suspicions that might be excited in your mind.

“Forgive these deceptions. They seemed to me necessary. That excuse will, I am sure, avail me.

“Two years ago the doctors assured me that the sea air would be very beneficial to you, so I purchased our present home and established you in it. Our home being a long way from Dieppe, the port from which I usually sail, my secret has been carefully guarded, up to this time, thanks to my assumed name, Captain l'Endurci, and neither you nor Suzanne have ever suspected that the famous corsair, whose bloody exploits so excited your horror, was your father, Yvon Cloarek.

“And now, my darling child, you know all. I have not made this confession with any hope of changing your resolution ; I can see that my presence will henceforth be extremely painful to you, but I could not leave you for ever without removing the veil of mystery that has enshrouded my conduct up to the present time.

“And now, farewell, and for ever, my beloved daughter.

“My only consolation is the thought that your future happiness is well-nigh certain. You love, and you are loved in return by a generous and noble-hearted man ; Suzanne will be another mother to you, and I leave you my good and faithful Segoffin.

“My notary has received full instructions in relation to your marriage contract. I wish your marriage to take place on the first of next month, so I may be with you in thought on that happy day.

“Once more farewell, my idolised daughter. The tears are falling so fast, that I cannot see to write any more.

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“ Your father, who loves you as he has always loved
you,

YVON CLOAREK.

“ Segoffin will tell you the cause of my hasty departure for Havre, and how I happened to return in time to rescue you from the wretches who were dragging you away.”

When the reading of this letter was concluded, Sabine, who was very pale and who seemed to be deeply moved, buried her face in her hands, and sobbed softly.

Segoffin exchanged another meaning look with Suzanne, and then, reconquering his own emotion, said :

“ Now, mademoiselle, with your permission, I will tell you how M. Yvon got here in time to save you.”

And Sabine making no reply, the head gunner continued :

“ That powdered gentleman, who was here the other day, Mlle. Sabine, was the owner of our vessel. He came to try to persuade M. Yvon to make another voyage. He had heard of a vessel laden with two millions in gold, that would soon be along, and offered us a chance of a stirring fight besides ; but M. Yvon had promised you he would not leave you again, so he refused, whereupon the ship owner told your father that the ship’s crew would certainly come for him, and take him away with them, whether or no. In order to prevent any such proceeding as that, which would have let the cat out of the bag, so far as you were concerned, we hurried off to Havre. Most of the crew were at a tavern there. They greeted M. Yvon with the wildest enthusiasm and delight, for he is as tenderly loved by these rough corsairs as he is by the members of his own family ; for though he can be severe, if need be, he is also just and humane. There is more than one English captain, mademoiselle, whom M. Yvon has captured and then set free with all his personal belongings. And do you know why ? Because

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the first question your father always asked a prisoner was, ‘ Have you a daughter ? ’

“ If he answered in the affirmative,” continued Segoffin, “ he was all right, for, as M. Yvon often said to me, ‘ I love my little Sabine too much to hold a man who has a daughter, a prisoner.’ ”

“ So Mlle. Sabine, you have made many a father and daughter happy in England, without even suspecting it. But excuse me, I had almost forgotten what I started to tell you. Well, though the sailors were so glad to see your father again, they got very angry when they found out that he had no intention of going to sea again, and there was no such thing as inducing them to listen to reason. I have seen M. Yvon in a great peril many a time, but never did I see him show such courage as he did the other day, when he refused what would have been the crowning glory of his maritime career, and why ? ‘ Because I have given my daughter my word,’ he said. But this was not all. His refusal so infuriated the crew that some of them even went so far as to hint that if your father refused, it was because he was afraid to fight the famous English captain. He, M. Yvon, afraid ! After that, Mlle. Sabine, he said to me, in a low tone, and with a melancholy smile that I shall never forget :

“ ‘ My affection for my daughter has been really put to the test for the first time in my life, and now I know that there is not a father in the world who loves his child more than I do.’ ”

“ Go on, go on, Segoffin,” pleaded Sabine, evidently deeply moved.

“ When they ventured to accuse M. Yvon of cowardice, he coldly replied that his mind was made up, and that it was useless for them to insist further. A scene of the wildest excitement followed, and some of the men shouted: ‘ Let us take the captain, whether or no. The first mate can navigate the vessel, and when the captain sees the enemy, he’ll change his mind fast enough.’ ”

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"They were all so excited that I don't know how the affair would have ended, had not an officer of the fort, who knew that the captain of the *Hell-hound* was at the tavern, come rushing in to tell M. Yvon that a fishing-smack had just come in and reported that a suspicious-looking schooner had been sighted from the cliffs, and that appearances seemed to indicate her intention of making a landing, as had been done at several other points along the coast. There being no war-ship in the harbour the officer came to implore the captain of the *Hell-hound* to go out and attack the schooner if she made any attempt to land. M. Yvon could not refuse, as it was in defence of his country that he was requested to give his services. We were soon aboard the brig; the wind was favourable, we weighed anchor, and were soon flying along in search of the schooner. Right here, Mlle. Sabine, I must tell you something that M. Yvon dared not confess in his letter. He speaks, you know, of a superstitions idea he had in connection with his never having been wounded. You must understand, Mlle. Sabine, that your poor father's life has been divided as it were into two parts,—one supremely happy, the part spent at home or in talking with me about you; the other desolation itself, the hours spent in thinking of your poor dear mother, whom he loved even more tenderly than he loves you, as Suzanne has told you a hundred times. The night she died, it so happened that he had dressed himself in Breton costume to attend a fancy dress ball. Being very young at the time, you did not recognise him. After this calamity, when we shipped as common sailors on a privateer where every one dressed as he pleased, M. Yvon said to me: 'As I am here to expiate a crime I shall regret all my life, I intend always to wear the costume of my native province at sea. It has become sacred to me, as I wore it on the fatal night when I held my poor dying wife in my arms for the last time.'

ANGER

"M. Yvon has kept his word ever since, in spite of my entreaties, for it having been reported in England that the famous corsair, Captain l'Endurci, wore the Breton costume, it was at M. Yvon that every one aimed. But though your father exposed himself so much more than any of the rest of us, he was never wounded, and as there is a superstitious streak in the composition of every human being, M. Yvon finally began to think that there must be a protecting charm attached to our national costume. The sailors, too, imagined that this costume brought the ship good luck. At least, they would have felt much less confident of success if M. Yvon had commanded them in any other garb, so that is why M. Yvon, when he went aboard to go out and fight the schooner, put on the costume of his native province exactly as he would have put on a uniform, not supposing for an instant that there was any likelihood of his going to his own home.

"We had been sailing around about three-quarters of an hour, when all at once we saw a bright light stream up on the coast above the cliffs. A careful scrutiny convinced the captain that the house where we lived was on fire; and almost at the same moment, the first mate, with the aid of a night telescope, discovered the schooner riding at anchor, with all her boats at the foot of the cliff where the English had doubtless landed. The captain ordered the long-boat lowered, and sprang into it in company with me and twenty picked men. We reached the scene of action in a quarter of an hour. M. Yvon received his first wound while striking down the leader of the bandits, a Captain Russell, who figured so prominently in the abduction of M. Yvon a short time ago. Wounded by your father and left a prisoner at Dieppe, he had nevertheless managed to make his escape and concoct this new conspiracy. This, Mlle. Sabine, is the whole truth with regard to M. Yvon. He has suffered, oh, how he has suffered these three last days! and this is

CONCLUSION.

nothing to what he will suffer up to the time of your marriage ; but after that, when he knows you are happy, I fear that he can endure it no longer. No human being could and — ”

“ My father, where is my father ? ” cried Sabine, trembling with grief, anxiety, and long repressed tenderness.

“ Really, mademoiselle, I do not know that I ought — ”

“ My father, is he here ? ” repeated the girl breathlessly.

“ He is not very far off, perhaps,” replied Segoffin, nearly wild with joy ; “ but if he returns, it must be never to leave you again.”

“ Oh, can he ever forgive me for having doubted his love and his nobility of soul for one moment ? If he will, all the rest of my life shall be devoted to him. My God ! you are silent, you are all weeping — you are all looking toward that room as if my father were there. Thank Heaven ! my father is there ! ” cried Sabine, her face radiant with inexpressible joy as she ran toward the door leading into the next room.

The door suddenly opened, and in another instant father and daughter were locked in each other’s arms.

One month afterward, a double marriage united Suzanne and Segoffin, Sabine and Onésime.

The famous Doctor Gasterini, equally celebrated as a gourmand and as a physician, had restored Onésime’s sight.

On returning from the church, Segoffin remarked to Suzanne with a triumphant air :

“ Ah, well, my dear, was I not right in telling you that, ‘ what is to be, will be ? ’ Haven’t I always predicted that you would be Madame Segoffin some day ? Are you, or are you not ? ”

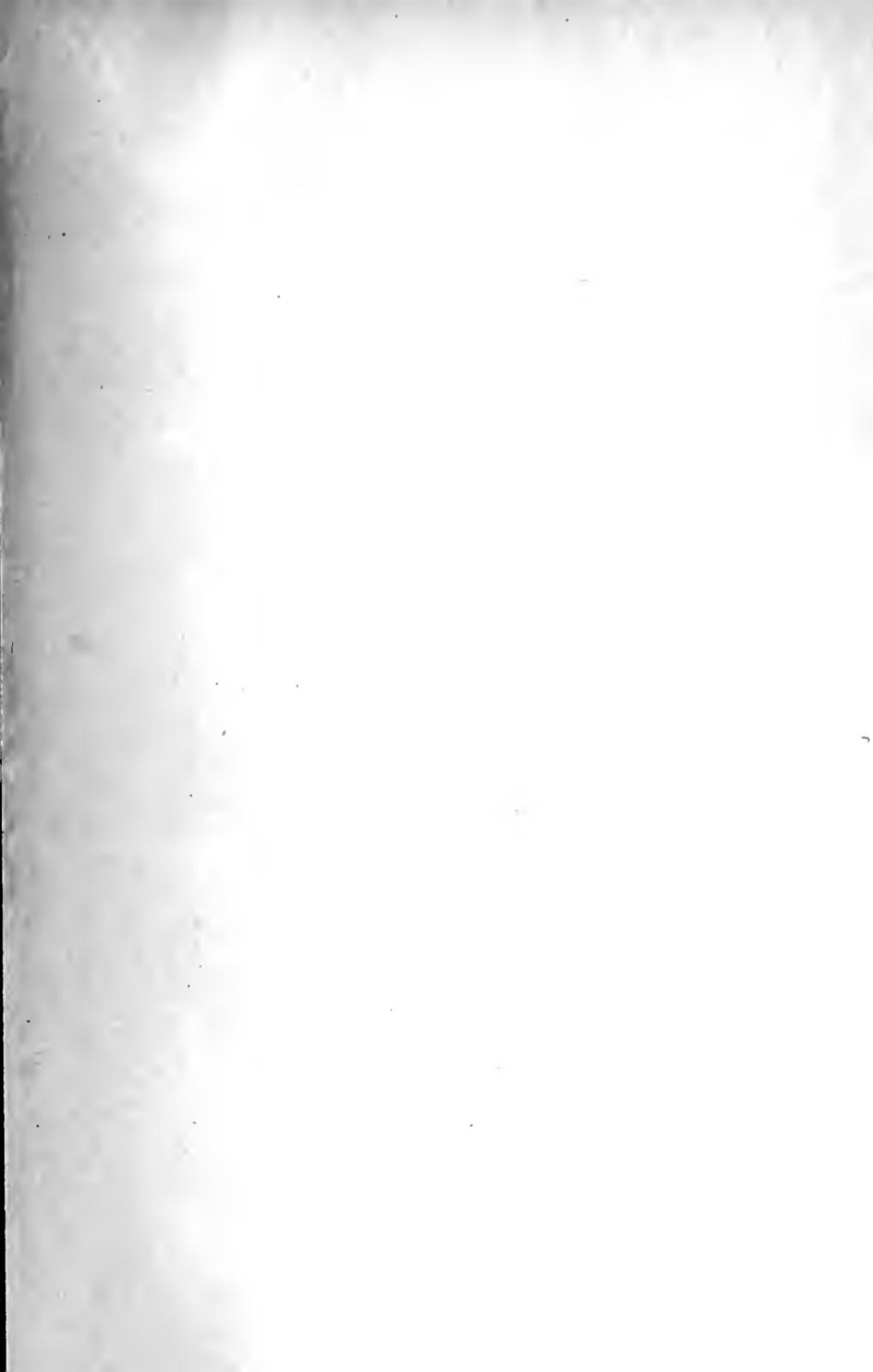
“ Oh, well, I suppose one must make the best of it,”

ANGER.

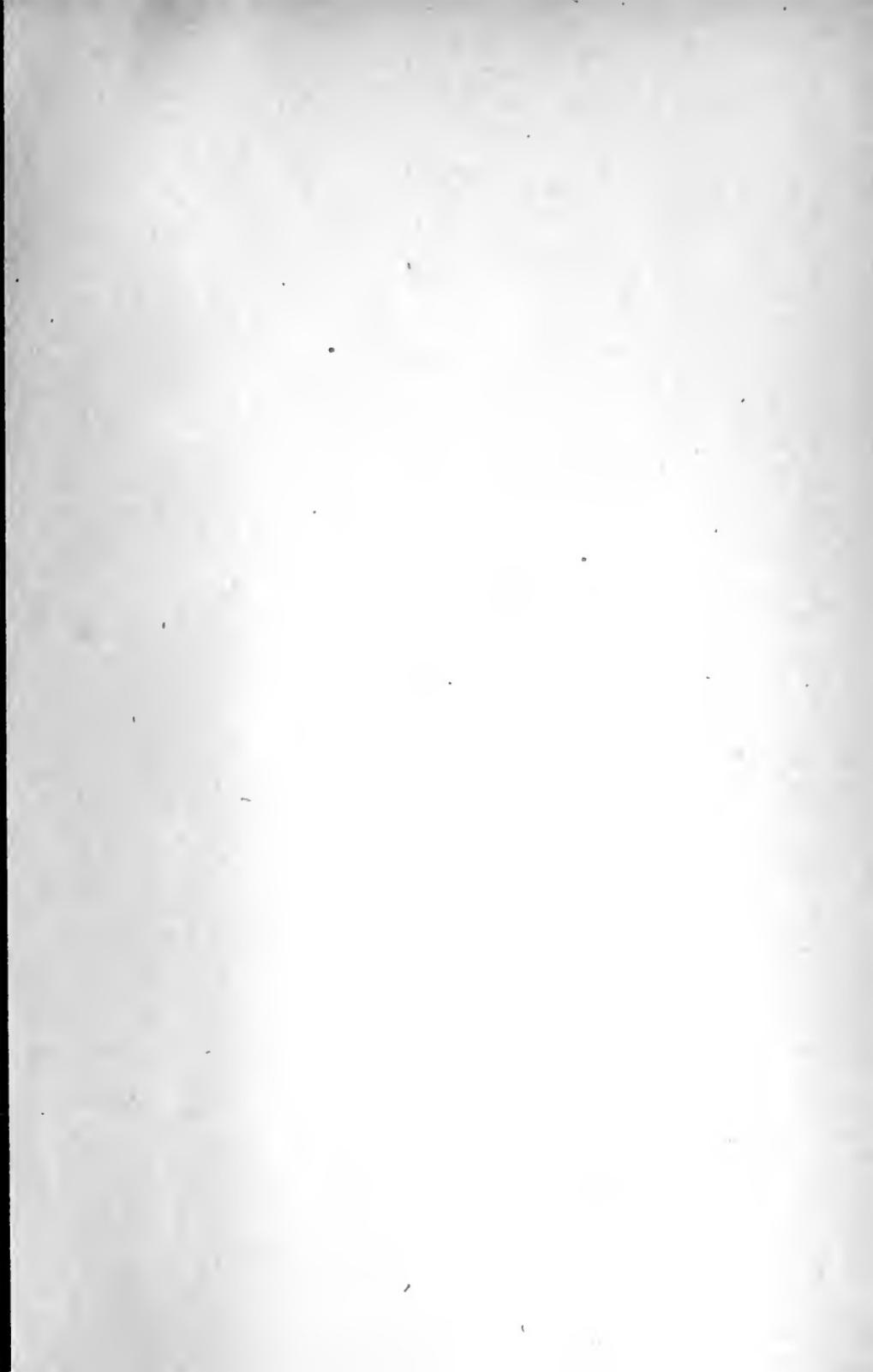
responded Madame Segoffin, with a pretended sigh, though she really felt as proud of her husband as if he had been one of the heroes of the *Grande Armée* she was so fond of raving about. “There’s no help for it, I suppose, as ‘that which is done cannot be undone.’”

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THE END.









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